

JUNE 1960 VOLUME 7 No 6

The London Magazine

A monthly review of literature

SYLVIA PLATH

Two Poems

L. P. HARTLEY

Two for the River

CHARLES CAUSLEY

Two Poems

KAY CICELLIS

Arise and Eat

GEORGE ORWELL

George Gissing

IAN FLETCHER

Explorations and Recoveries II:
Symons, Yeats and the Demonic Dance

REX WARNER

on Robert Graves's *Iliad*

and other
POEMS AND BOOK REVIEWS

EDITED BY JOHN LEHMANN

THREE SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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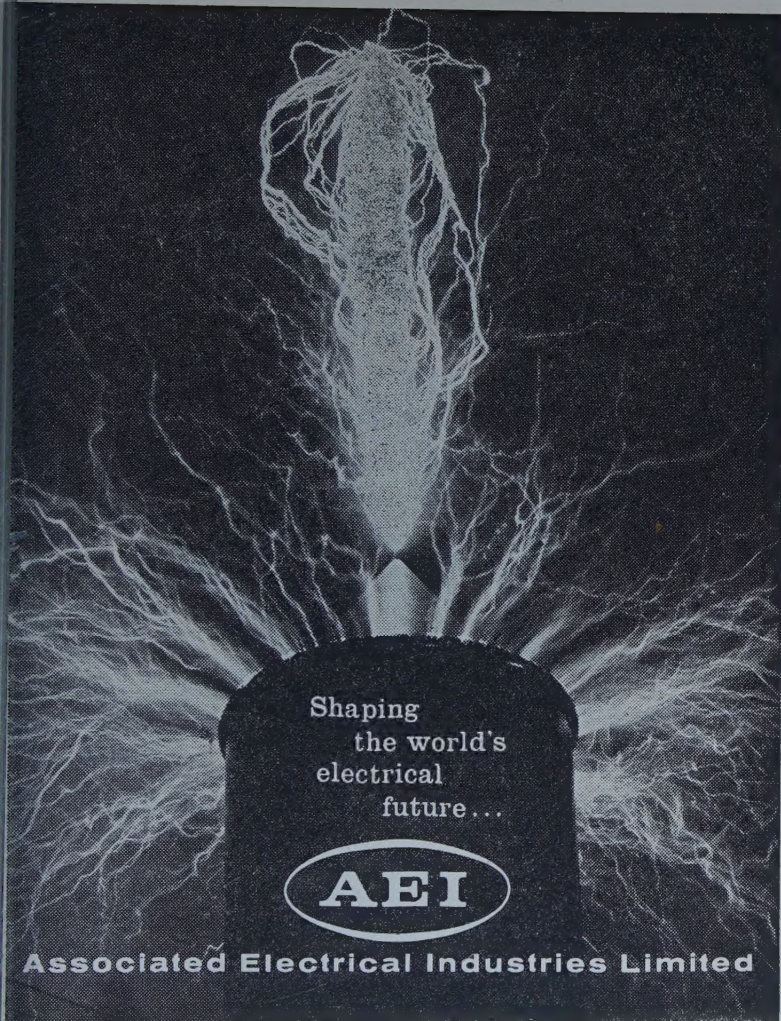
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TWO SHILLINGS



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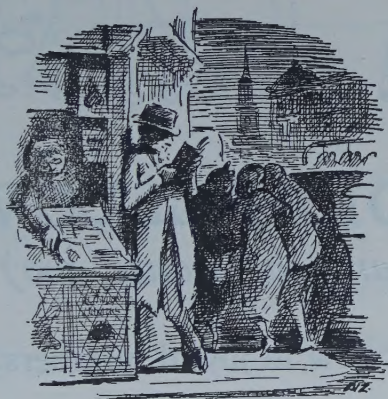
Contributions should be sent to the Editor
The London Magazine, 22 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2
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The London Magazine is published monthly and can be
obtained from your newsagent or bookseller at 3s. 6d.
per copy, or you can take out a year's subscription [post
free] for 42s. or \$7 through your local supplier or by
sending to the publishers, The Shenval Press, 58 Frith
Street, London, W.1

Please make cheques or postal orders payable to *The
London Magazine*

Printed in Great Britain
for the proprietors John Lehmann and Jennifer Ross
by the Shenval Press, Simson Shand Ltd
London, Hertford and Harlow

THE LONDON MAGAZINE



EDITED BY

John Lehmann

JUNE 1960 VOLUME 7 NO 6



LONGFELLOW

(and short ones, too)

Tell it now in joyful numbers,
 Life with Guinness is more gay
 Poets, peasants, peers and plumbers
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Yes,
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GUINNESS
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Contents



Foreword		7
Two Poems	<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	11
Two for the River	<i>L. P. Hartley</i>	14
Two Poems	<i>Charles Causley</i>	27
Arise and Eat	<i>Kay Cicellis</i>	29
Ghost Story	<i>J. G. Warry</i>	35
George Gissing	<i>George Orwell</i>	36
Elegy	<i>Ray Mathew</i>	44
Explorations and Recoveries—II		
Symons, Yeats and the Demonic Dance	<i>Ian Fletcher</i>	46
Correspondence		61
Book Reviews by Rex Warner	64, Malcolm Bradbury	
66, Maurice Cranston	69, Francis Wyndham	72, Charles
Osborne	74, John Holloway	77
Notes About Our Authors		84

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Foreword



One of the most interesting facts that emerges from Sir Stanley Unwin's recently published autobiography, *The Truth About A Publisher*,¹ is the success with which he has, throughout his career, taken over lame or bankrupt firms, and the frequency with which the opportunity has presented itself. Again and again Sir Stanley, first on the scene when crisis can no longer be staved off, spots the valuable asset and makes the successful bid. He himself comments, very justly, on the fact that in the unjust publishing world small firms with limited means often take the risk on the first book of an author with brilliant but unusual gifts, only to lose him to a big firm that is able to offer a handsome bribe once the donkey work has been done and the gamble has proved successful. Anyone who has been through the publishing mill knows this to be one of the painful truths about it; it is equally true that the good authors are lost to small firms because they go bust, because in the men who run them business acumen is not as highly developed as in the remarkable case of Sir Stanley. In almost every chapter, and more than once, Sir Stanley mentions distinguished names that came to his list through his wide-awake zeal in picking up the pieces of his less fortunate colleagues' efforts; and it seems that they very rarely regretted the chance that brought them under his wing.

This is not surprising. Sir Stanley belongs to a class of publisher which, I believe, is dying out. Though a man of great culture, I do not think he would deny that profit-making, not literature, always came first with him. All through his life, as this autobiography reveals, he has shown not only courage and integrity, but also immense industry, ingenious resourcefulness, passion for detail, pertinacity, and business flair. He tells us that even as a small boy at school he entered 'with avidity and enjoyment' into the business of bartering curios and postage stamps with his schoolfellows. He describes how as a young man he managed to save his father from a financial disaster at the last moment by the rewording of a letter 'in a completely contrary sense'. He knew, as if by instinct, that publishing was a hard school, and as soon as he entered the profession, unlike so many of his contemporaries who have vanished with scarcely a trace, he devoted himself to attending to the pennies so diligently

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FOREWORD

that the pounds have indeed looked after themselves. He has never neglected a single chance of selling a single copy of a book, however cheap. It is generally believed that if Sir Stanley were shipwrecked anywhere in the world, he would know at once how far the nearest bookshop was and would have visited it—to obtain an order—before rescue. Thus it has been that through the years he has built up a big, reputable, reliable business entirely impregnated with his own personality and which—largely for that reason—has given authors confidence. Nor has he ever wavered in his belief that if knowledge and ideas know no frontiers they should also know no restrictions in their dissemination; a belief he has always been ready to take up arms to defend.

It seems to me unlikely that the publishing conditions of the future are going to allow much room for people like Sir Stanley; and more's the pity. The increase in competition and risk; the narrowing of profit margins when prices have not kept pace with costs; the growing importance of the mass paper-back markets; and the increasing exploitation of an ever smaller number of topical, popular books through all the new media of publicity; all these developments surely mean that more capital than ever before will be needed to survive in publishing, that it will in fact become a branch of big business and no longer a matter of individual taste backed by individual work and money. Sir Stanley's career proves that though publishing has always been a luck game, luck has never been enough; and that though literary flair is needed to build a literary list, no one is likely to keep it who hasn't got an extremely shrewd business sense as well. The danger for the future is that changed conditions will not only eliminate the man whose asset is love and instinct for literature more quickly than ever, but that they will also eliminate the Sir Stanleys who knew just how to foster with individual care the authors such a man had originally discovered.

For the next few months the direction of *The London Magazine* will be mainly in other hands. While I take a long holiday, the editors will be Mr Alan Ross and Mr Maurice Cranston, who will have the assistance of Miss Barbara Cooper and Mr Charles Osborne as before, and also the special advice of Mr William Plomer. All these persons have long been associated with the magazine, and I leave it to them with complete confidence—and also with gratitude.

JOHN LEHMANN

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CHATTO & WINDUS

SYLVIA PLATH

Two Poems



THE SLEEPERS

No map traces the street
Where those two sleepers are.
We have lost track of it.
They lie as if under water
In a blue, unchanging light,
The French window ajar

Curtained with yellow lace.
Through the narrow crack
Odours of wet earth rise.
The snail leaves a silver track;
Dark thickets hedge the house.
We take a backward look.

Among petals pale as death
And leaves steadfast in shape
They sleep on, mouth to mouth.
A white mist is going up.
The small green nostrils breathe,
And they turn in their sleep.

Ousted from that warm bed
We are a dream they dream.
Their eyelids keep the shade.
No harm can come to them.
We cast our skins and slide
Into another time.

FULL FATHOM FIVE

Old man, you surface seldom.
Then you come in with the tide's coming
When seas wash cold, foam-

Capped: white hair, white beard, far-flung,
A dragnet, rising, falling, as waves
Crest and trough. Miles long

Extend the radial sheaves
Of your spread hair, in which wrinkling skeins
Knotted, caught, survives

The old myth of origins
Unimaginable. You float near
As keeled ice-mountains

Of the north, to be steered clear
Of, not fathomed. All obscurity
Starts with a danger:

Your dangers are many. I
Cannot look much but your form suffers
Some strange injury

And seems to die: so vapours
Ravel to clearness on the dawn sea.
The muddy rumours.

Of your burial move me
To half-believe: your reappearance
Proves rumours shallow,

For the archaic trenched lines
Of your grained face shed time in runnels:
Ages beat like rains

On the unbeaten channels
Of the ocean. Such sage humour and
Durance are whirlpools

TWO POEMS

To make away with the ground-
Work of the earth and the sky's ridgepole.
Waist down, you may wind

One labyrinthine tangle
To root deep among knuckles, shinbones,
Skulls. Inscrutable,

Below shoulders not once
Seen by any man who kept his head,
You defy questions

You defy other godhood.
I walk dry on your kingdom's border
Exiled to no good.

Your shelled bed I remember.
Father, this thick air is murderous.
I would breathe water.

Two for the River



Mid-August was a dull time in my garden—the drought had been seen to that. Flowers there were, but even the hardiest were only half their normal size; the Japanese anemones looked like shillings, not half-crowns. Because the garden lay beside the river, and sometimes, in wet seasons, under it, people thought the sub-soil must be moist, but it was not; the rain ran off the steep slope without sinking in, the river drained the ground without irrigating it.

But the river banks themselves were in full glory, two interminable winding borders on which grew willow-weed and loose-strife, the lilac clusters of hemp agrimony, deep yellow ragwort, lemon-yellow chickweed, the peeping purple of the woody nightshade, the orange drops of the ranunculus, the youthful, tender teasel-cones of palest pink contrasting with their hard, brown, dried-up predecessors of the year before—and, a newcomer to the district but very much at home, the tall white balsam. Did the other flowers realize their danger from this rampant stranger with its innocent baby-face? Did they foresee the day when it, and only it, would occupy their standing room, making a close-set jungle through which a man could hardly force his way—while the plants, if it was their shooting season, popped off their pods at him? Nor would the invasion stop at the river bank; it would follow up its conquest through the meadows. And how would the fishermen fare, who even now had to hack out from the massed vegetation steps and nests for themselves on competition days? Only the water-lilies would be safe, and the armies of reeds and rushes—the sword-shaped ones of yellow-green, the round pike shafts of bluish-green, tufted with pennons—for they would have the water to protect them.

On garden and river bank alike autumn had already laid its spoiling finger, bringing languor and disarray to the luxuriance of summer, making it flop and sprawl. To this the river itself bore witness, for on its grey-green surface floated the earliest victims of

the year's decline, yellow willow leaves tip-tilted like gondolas, that twirled and sported in the breeze, until the greedy water sucked them under.

But the flowers grew further upstream. On my stretch of the river there were none; trees overhung it on both sides, on mine a copper beech, a mountain ash, a square-cut bay tree, a silver birch, a box elder, and in the corner by the boathouse, threatening its foundations, a dome-capped sycamore. A low stone wall divided the river from the garden, which was narrow for its length and sloping steeply to the lawn; and from the outward-curving terrace in front of the house you could see the river, a mirror broken here and there by tree trunks, and darkened by the reflections of the trees on the further bank; or maybe by the image of a cow, suspended in mid-water upside-down, the shadowy feet seeming almost to touch the real feet. Sometimes these reflections were clearer than the things reflected, so little current was there in the summer, or breeze to ruffle them. But faithful likenesses though they were, they had no colour, except a darker shade of olive green. The river imposed its own colour on everything it looked at, even the sky.

'Shall I bathe?' I thought. Flanking the boathouse was a flight of steps, ending in a large square flagstone, only a few inches above the water level. Ideal for a dive! And the water was deep almost at once, twenty feet deep, some said; I hadn't plumbed it. It did invite me. I laid aside my pen, for I was writing in the open air, a thing I seldom do—the open air has so many distractions, so many claims on one's attention: the river itself, for instance! But no, it was too late to bathe: the August sun hung over Follet Down, and my circulation wasn't what it used to be. Tomorrow at midday, perhaps . . .

As I was taking up my pen again, with the dull, cold sense of self-congratulation that an unwilling act of prudence sometimes brings, I saw a ripple spreading on the river, convex at first, then slightly concave. It was the swans, angry as usual. What trouble those odious birds had given me! He, the cob, was much the worse of the two; she was a nasty creature, with a supercilious, inquisitive expression, but she only aided and abetted him. He was a demon. An inveterate oarsman with a large experience of swans, I had often thought that this one was possessed: Jupiter in disguise perhaps, or not even in disguise. He seemed to think I had designs on her. A Leda-complex! I shouldn't have thought of bathing if I'd known he was about, for he had a bad record with bathers. And with boaters a worse one; but I was his favourite target. He had only to see me in my skiff to go for me. It was a slender craft, hard to trim and easily upset: if I had had hair enough to matter I should have parted it in the

middle. His methods of attack varied from in-fighting, when he would try to get his wing under the boat, to dive-bombing tactics. These were still more alarming. Spying me from afar he would come after me, skimming over the water and then, when I was bracing myself to take the impact of this living rocket, subside behind me in a smother of foam. The four-barred iron seat in the stern defended me: he dared not risk collision with it. But he had found a way round it, and now his system was to by-pass the stern and try to land on one of the sculls. So far he had missed his mark, but if he hit it. . . .

What was he up to now? With snaky neck pressed down between outward-curving wings held taut for flight, he was forcing his way upstream with powerful thrusts, using his feet for oars, as the Greek poet said. Behind him at a discreet distance came his mate, paddling feverishly, but with neck erect, not battened down as his was. Had they seen another swan perhaps, an interloper? For this was *their* reach of the river, as it had been mine, before they came, and they would not tolerate another swan on it.

They passed on, out of sight, but his baleful, malignant presence lingered with me; I have never seen, in any creature, such devilish intent as flashed from that wicked eye. Swollen with anger, he looked twice the size of other swans. Had it become a struggle for mastery between us? Did he embody some spirit of opposition to me, that the place had? I loved it, but since I bought it, eleven years ago, so many vexatious and frustrating things had happened. . . .

Now all was peace. The river had regained its glassy surface and restored the sense of quietude which the contemplation of still water nearly always gives me. Just as the sudden cessation of a noise — a dog barking or someone hammering — induces sleep, so did the let-up in my swan-resentment prepare my mind for more congenial guests. Now for some real work.

Or so I promised myself, and rested my elbows on the iron table, painted green to match the garden. But my musings were once more interrupted before they became fertile. Another ripple spread across the river, and before I had time to wonder if it heralded another swan, I heard the sound of voices, a man's voice and a woman's. This didn't surprise me. Boats, other than mine, were infrequent on the river, because of the weir, half a mile below, that protected it from the populous reach used by the townspeople. But hardier spirits sometimes lifted their boats round the weir and went on upstream into the unspoilt countryside.

Instead of carrying on past me, as I thought they would, the voices seemed to become stationary, and changed their tone. From being desultory they became animated; from being animated,

argumentative. Which of the two prevailed I still don't know, but it was the man who called out to me.

'Sir!'

I was only a stone's throw from them, and not many feet above them, but as I am a little deaf I got up from my table, rather unwillingly, and went down the steps through the rockery and across the lawn in the direction the sounds came from. Leaning over the wall I saw them, in a smart, light new canoe, the man, who sat behind, holding on to the big flagstone that served as my diving board.

I suppose they hadn't seen or heard me coming, for they looked up as if I was an apparition. They were both very fair, in their late twenties, I should guess, and both very good-looking—she especially. She had a longish face, deep blue eyes, and corn-gold hair piled high on her head. They were both wearing white.

He was the first to speak.

'Sir,' he said again (perhaps it was a tribute to my age), 'you must excuse us, but we wondered if you would let us use your landing-stage to change places in the boat? You see we are not skilled canoeists, and my wife is rather tired of paddling always on one side. We mustn't change places in mid-stream, I'm told. If you would allow us to land for a moment—'

His pleasant voice, her questioning, self-deprecatory smile, and their unassuming air (boating brings out rowdyism in so many people), made me take to them.

'Of course,' I said. 'But aren't you tired, having come all the way from Warmwell? Why not stop and have a drink, one for the river, before you go on?'

They exchanged a doubtful look. Does the prospect bore them? I thought, instantly suspicious. But the woman said:

'You're very kind. We'd like to.'

'Let me give you a hand,' I said. 'You mustn't rock the boat too much'—a timely warning, as it turned out, for they made a very awkward landing. 'I told you we were amateurs,' the man said. 'In fact we only bought this canoe yesterday. We're on our honeymoon; it's almost the first thing we've bought since we were married! We're staying in Warmwell to house-hunt,' he went on, 'and the river looked so inviting with the swans by Paulet Bridge, and all,—we thought it would be fun to have our own boat, and go prospecting. That's what brought us here! But it's an awkward piece of luggage to travel with. Perhaps we shall give it away. But I hope—'

By this time we were halfway across the lawn. They fitted their long strides to mine; their graceful, white-clad figures were so tall

I wondered how they tucked themselves into the boat.

We had drinks in my study, a darkish room in spite of its three windows. The creepers I once planted had rampaged. The jessamine looked in at one window, too intrusively, and the other two were darkened by the clematis which dripped from the veranda in untidy loops and streamers. But my visitors were enchanted.

'So this is where you work?' the woman asked.

'Yes, but how did you know?'

She looked towards my disorderly writing desk, and smiling shook her head.

'I recognize the signs . . . Besides—' she caught her husband's eye and stopped.

While I was pouring out the drinks a sort of telepathic communication stirred in me.

'Did you come out looking for a house?' I ventured.

Again they exchanged glances.

'In a way,' the man said. 'The agent told us—'

'Yes?'

'That there was a house on the river that might be for sale. We wondered if we could spot it.'

'Was that why you stopped and hailed me?'

They both coloured.

'No,' he said. 'We genuinely wanted to change places, for Sylvia was getting tired. My name is Harry,' he said hastily. 'Harry Marchmont. We're not the imposters that perhaps we look! But we did just think—'

'That this house was for sale?'

He nodded.

'Well, I'm the owner of it,' I said, 'and I can assure you that it isn't.'

I spoke more stiffly than I meant to, but one or two other people had been sent by agents to make the same inquiry. Why had it got about that I meant to sell the house? They blushed again, more deeply than before.

'Oh, we are so sorry,' Mrs Marchmont said, while her husband made inarticulate noises of apology. 'Of course there are several other houses by the river—'

'But not owned by a writer,' said I, giving their embarrassment no time to wear off, 'and not quite on the river. They are cut off from it by a tow-path.'

'I'm sure they're not half so nice as this one,' Mrs. Marchmont said. She drained her glass. 'Now, Harry, we must be getting on our way, and not waste any more of Mr . . . Mr Minchin's time.'

So they knew my name, too.

We were all on our feet, the smiles of goodbye stiffening our faces, when to my great surprise I heard myself saying:

'But as you're here, won't you look over the house?'

In some confusion, protesting that they mustn't, that it was an imposition, that they had already trespassed too much on my kindness, they agreed.

We made a tour of the house, and they professed themselves delighted with everything they saw. At first their comments were strictly those of sightseers. 'Oh, what a lovely view! And that church tower between the trees on the hill! Has anybody painted it?' But soon their reactions grew more personal, and sharpened by the excitement of possible possession. 'This room would be perfect for a nursery, wouldn't it? Just put bars across the windows and a little gate outside to shut off the staircase . . . Are you married, Mr Minchin?'

I was used to this question from women who were strangers to me.

'No.'

'Do you live in this big house all alone?'

'I'm overhoused, but several people live here; they help me in various ways, and I give them house-room. On the whole they seem contented.'

What uphill work it was, in these days, trying to run a private house! They were anachronisms, really. But the depression I sometimes felt about my domestic situation, which was so much easier than most people's, came of having no one at hand to grumble to, no confidant. Whereas this couple—

Mrs Marchmont was saying: 'Of course we shouldn't want to alter anything. A bathroom here or there, perhaps . . .'

'My dear, you mustn't talk like that. It's Mr Minchin's house, and he doesn't want to sell it.'

'Of course not, Mr Minchin, I was just day-dreaming. But what would you do with all your beautiful things?'

'Supposing I sold it?'

'There I go again,' she said, all penitence. 'Of course you must keep it—it's such a perfect setting for them. We should only wreck it, shouldn't we, Harry?'

Embarrassed, he mumbled something.

My beautiful things! They had seemed so once, when one by one I had collected them: but how seldom had the glow of acquisition lasted from one side of the counter to the other! How soon one took them all for granted! Whereas the possessions of the mind!—It was

the onset of old age, no doubt: once I hadn't felt that way. Nor would a young couple coming fresh to a place, with eyes and hearts alive to pretty things, feel that way, either.

We were back in my study.

'Well, it has been a great experience,' said Sylvia, the spokesman of the two, 'a great privilege, and one we didn't deserve. We ought to have been turned out on our ears. Instead, we've had a glimpse of Paradise.'

'It's odd you should say that,' I said, 'for "Paradise Paddock" is the name of the house.'

'What an unusual name, and how appropriate! Thank you so much, Mr Minchin. Now Harry—'

She held her hand out, and I said:

'Just one more for the river?'

They laughed and Mr Marchmont said: 'There's no law against being drunk in charge of a boat.'

We drank, and his wife said: 'Here's good luck, Mr Minchin. You must never, never, never sell your house.'

The words struck my heart like a knell, and involuntarily I said:

'Supposing I wanted to sell it, would you buy it?'

'But you don't want to sell it.'

'But if I did?'

The tension in my feelings must have spread to the room: it seemed to listen for their answer.

'If you did, we should be buyers,' said Mr Marchmont, quietly. 'Provided, of course . . .'

'That we could afford it,' put in his wife.

I felt they could; you didn't buy a canoe to give away if you were not well off.

'But where would you put all your lovely things?'

'They could go with the house.'

'Do you really mean that?' they asked me, almost in one breath.

'I think I do, I think I do, I must have time to think,' I babbled.

'Of course you must, of course you must.' They looked at me with extreme concern, as if I had been taken ill: but hope and joy sparkled in their eyes.

'Imagine it,' said Mrs Marchmont, rapt, ecstatic, as if she saw a vision. 'Imagine living here!'

More to gain time than for any other reason I said:

'Another for the river!'

But this time they refused.

'Two must be our limit.'

'Telephone me from your hotel when you get back,' I said, 'and

I'll let you know, one way or the other.'

Their faces fell at the uncertainty, and my heart missed a beat. Could I draw back? Had I committed myself?

'I'll see you safely off the premises,' I said.

At that they smiled, and I smiled with them. But whereas I smiled in relief,—that I could put off, for the moment, my decision, they smiled because their minds were made up, and they thought mine was, too. Victory! Paradise Paddock was within their grasp. It was slipping out of mine; was that defeat?

Twilight was falling when I escorted them to the landing stage.

'Let me go first, the steps are a bit tricky here.'

When we were safely on the lawn I said:

'You ring me up—or shall I ring you?'

'Oh, we'll ring you up.' Mr Marchmont said. 'You see we don't know when we shall be back.'

We had reached the second flight of steps, that led from the garden wall to the landing stage.

'Oh look, the boat is still here!' cried Mrs Marchmont.

'Why,' said her husband, 'did you think it would have floated away?'

'I have no faith in your knots,' his wife replied.

We laughed at this, no doubt thinking of the marriage knot. I bent down to steady the canoe: its satin-smooth surface pleased my fingers: I had little or no experience of canoes. Mrs Marchmont lowered herself into the back seat; he scrambled into the front one. The paddies dipped and gleamed.

'But you are going the wrong way!'

They back-watered clumsily towards me.

'We thought we'd see a little more of the river,' he said.

'You won't find another house on it,' I warned them.

'We don't want to! We don't want to!'

'When you come by again on your way back, give me a shout,' I said, 'and I'll tell you what I've decided—if I've decided anything.'

'Please let it be yes!'

They tried to wave; the frail craft lurched and teetered, and they were off. It was only as I saw them disappearing, their white-clad figures shining on the shadowed water, their busy paddles digging puddles in it, that I was reminded of the swans.

Back at my writing table on the terrace a black mood settled on me. I had had many such, sometimes without cause; but this one had a cause: the house itself was accusing me. Every window was an eye that looked reproach, a speaking eye that said, 'Why are you desert-

ing me? You have been happy here, as happy as your temperament would let you be! It was love at first sight, wasn't it? Didn't you make your mind up, then and there, to buy me? And think of your joy when you took possession—vacant possession as they called it, but it wasn't vacant, for I was here and I am still am here, the genius loci, your tutelary god! You wrote round to all your friends, "Paradise Paddock is its name, and a veritable paradise it is!" How have I failed you? Why have you changed?"

I couldn't answer, and the voice went on, 'I'll tell you why you have turned against me—it's for the same reason that you took to me. You fell in love with me and now you've fallen in love with them—that couple that were here a moment ago. You'd never set eyes on them before but they took your fancy, just as I did, and you thought: 'I can identify myself with them! Their youth shall be my youth, their happiness my happiness, their children my children, their future mine!' Yes, grey-haired Mr Minchin, you thought you could renew yourself in them, and lead vicariously the life you never led! But I'm not so fickle! I don't want them and their squalling children, who will deafen me with their clamour and never listen to my voice as you did, till they came. I don't want them, I tell you, and what's more, I won't have them!'

The voice of jealousy, no doubt, piercing what seemed a lifetime of sad, conflicting thoughts; but I had to heed it, for I could feel the house's enmity like a cold air at my back, feel too the threat of imminent and lasting rupture that a quarrel with an old friend brings. I tried to stop my ears but still the voice droned on, painting my future life away from Paradise Paddock in hues as dark as my own thoughts, as dark as the shadows gathering on the river, where a patch of light under the low branches might have been a swan. And not only my future, but the house's too. For the Marchmonts wouldn't keep it, the voice told me. Was it likely that a whim, born of being in love, fostered by a fine evening and stimulated by two dry martinis (dry, mind you,) for the river, would *last*? With the servant difficulty, and all those flights of stairs? On, no, mark my words, within a year, Paradise Paddock will again be on the market, and what then? A road house, will it be, with the river bank a lido? Or an old people's home, an eventide home,—fast falls the eventide! Or gutted and converted into flats—homes for the homeless, but not a home for you, you will have no home. That precious word will have no meaning for you. You have given your home up to the Marchmonts.

It was then I heard the beating of the swan's wings, a unique

sound, there is nothing like it, an aspirated gasping, as if the atmosphere itself was labouring to keep that mighty body airborne, fourteen pounds of bone and flesh and feathers, the heaviest living thing that flies. It chilled my blood, for to me it was the prelude to attack, the throbbing drone of the bombers before they loosed their bombs. I could see nothing on the shrouded river, but in my mind's eye I could see it all—the long white wings skimming towards me, and between them the bottle-shaped fuselage of body tapering to the arrowy neck and head—and, the next moment, crisis!—the necessity to think and act only in self-defence, to lose myself in anger, in mindless hostility, just as it, the swan, had.

But of course it wasn't me the bird was after: I was on dry land, out of harm's way. Its quarry now would be another swan—had been, perhaps, for this swan was a killer. Two or three times I'd seen a drifting body, its once white neck gnawed bare by rats or fishes. And when I reported this to the Inspector of the R.S.P.C.A., hoping to enlist his aid against the river tyrant, he only said, 'Yes, swans are like that.'

All this went through my mind, was driven into it by those powerful wing beats, as if by a hammer.

When, a few seconds later, the sound ceased, the air was unburdened of its urgency, and so was I; I got up as easily as if no panic spell had bound me, and took a turn along the terrace. I was my own master again and the house besides me as sightless and as speechless as any other house. A respite, but only for a moment, and then I must decide, say yes or no, and not on grounds of sentiment or fantasy. Could I afford to keep the house? Not as it should be kept. Could the Marchmonts? Apparently they could. Should I find a buyer with more feeling for it and its *genius loci* (how that creature had bullied me!) than they had? No, I shouldn't. Then wasn't it more sensible to close with an offer which might not be repeated?

The answer must be yes.

I returned to my table on the terrace with my mind made up. Ignoring the foolscap that glimmered at me I let my elbows slide along the table and in a moment—I suppose it was the release from indecision—the darkness pressed down on my eyes and took me into it.

I dreamed and it was a dark dream, for the house was dark. I entered through the study door, but nowhere could I find the switch, and when at last I found it, it didn't work. This seemed to reinforce the darkness; I dared not move for fear of falling over something, and then I knew the house was hostile to me, something or someone didn't want me to come in. I was an outsider, but I couldn't get out

any more than I could get in, for I couldn't tell where the door was. Where was I? If indoors, why did branches scrape against me? And what were these white flashes whirling round me, that clove the air like feathered scimitars? I tried to cry out but instead of my own voice I heard another, a jagged line of sound that struck against my ear and seemed to call my name. 'Mr Minchin! Mr Minchin!' The thin wail rose and fell. 'Remember to say yes,' I told myself. 'Yes is what you want and what they want. Yes, yes, yes, yes' — I was still saying it when I reached the river wall.

The sounds had stopped by then. Who knew how long the Marchmonts had been calling? Perhaps a long time; perhaps, getting no reply, they had given me up and were making tracks for Warmwell.

No, they were there, at least two people were who surely must be they — my visitors of who knew how long ago? My mind told me that they must be, though my eyes denied it, denied that this drenched couple in clothes no longer white but water-grey and so transparent that the skin showed through them, could be the Marchmonts. But their clothes were more recognizable than they were, for not a look I could remember, and hardly any awareness of themselves, each other, or of me, showed in their faces. The water in the canoe seemed to worry them, it was ankle deep and they could not keep their feet still.

'You've had a spill,' I said. 'Come in and let me find you some dry clothes.'

Neither of them answered for a moment or two: Mrs Marchmont was the first to find her tongue.

'No, thank you, we'll go on. We're not cold really. We shall be dry by the time we get to Warmwell. We stopped here because . . . Why did we stop, Harry?'

'Because we said we would,' he answered in a voice of which the inflexions were quite out of his control. 'Mr . . . Mr . . . was going to tell us something.'

'Look, you've had a shock,' I said, 'a nasty experience. Do come in and I'll give you something to warm you.'

'We did have a nasty experience,' he said in his lilting sing-song. 'That's why we . . . don't want to stay. That damned bird . . . it set about us—'

'Ah,' I said, 'I was afraid so.'

'It got us in the water where the banks were high. I didn't think we could climb out, with it thrashing around. It got on to her back, the great big bugger, and would have drowned her, but I was on the bank by that time and I bashed it . . . with the paddle, you know.'

'Did you kill it?' I asked.

'I think so. Do you see her dress, how torn it is, and her skin, all in ribbons. We'll have to see a doctor.'

I looked, and looked away.

'Yes,' I said, 'but do stay now. I'll call a doctor, if you like.'

He shook his head. 'We don't think the place is healthy for us, and we'd better be off, thanks all the same. And thanks for the drinks, too—what a big drink we nearly had! And thanks for everything. Now there was something we were going to tell you, or you were going to tell us, that's why we stopped. For the life of me, I can't think what it was.'

'It was about this house,' I said, 'Paradise Paddock. I was going to say that I would sell it if you wanted it.'

He laughed and laughed.

'Yes, that was it. What do you think, Sylvia, old girl?'

She shook her head and said, without looking up, and still twiddling her toes in the water, 'I'm afraid I don't want it now.'

'Don't think us rude, old chap,' her husband said, with sudden earnestness, 'but the fact is, we don't like your house any more. We think it's got a hoodoo on it. We don't want any more swan-songs.'

'I should feel the same,' I said, 'if I were you.' They shivered a little, and I shivered in concert.

'No offence meant, if we say we think this place is a bit lousy.'

'Of course not.'

'You find that it suits you?'

'Well, yes and no,' I said. 'It may suit me better now.' I was wondering if the swan was really dead.

'Well, thanks for all the drinks you gave us, thanks a lot.'

'Don't speak of it,' I said.

'We shall often think of you,' said Mrs Marchmont suddenly, 'sitting and writing, with all your treasures round you.'

My heart sank, then soared.

'So you won't be settling in Warmwell?'

'Not on your life, not on your life . . . Or ours,' he added. 'Excuse me—no offence intended.'

'I'm sorry about that,' I said. 'But you know best.' I saw that they were longing to be off, but didn't quite know how to take their leave.

'Let's tip the water out of the boat,' I suggested. 'You'll be more comfortable so.'

'Don't tip us out with it!'

'You'll have to debark first,' I said.

They laughed.

'We had forgotten that,' he said shakily.

When the operation was completed, and they were settled in

again, he suddenly said: 'Would you accept this canoe as a memento, Mr . . . Mr . . . ?'

'Minchin,' put in his wife.

'Minchin, of course.'

'Most gratefully,' I said.

'I'll have it sent to Paradise Paddock, then . . . ' He thought for a moment. 'Happy days,' he said. 'Have a good time,' said his wife, in an uncertain voice.

'And you!'

But they were already gone, and in a minute or two the darkness closed behind them.

I lingered by the river, trying to regain my faith in it, as one sometimes does with a friend after a quarrel. Mutely I apostrophized it. 'You have let me down, you have let me down! What have you to say?' But it was voiceless: the stealthy rustlings and stirrings under the tree-laden banks were not meant for any ears, mine least of all. How vain to hope from nature a reciprocating mood, I thought—when suddenly, as though in answer to my thought, a V-shaped ripple stole along the river setting the water lapping at my feet, and after it a swan, a solitary swan. How changed she was! The anxious turning of the head from side to side, the questing, peering look, the jerky progress, that had lost its stately rhythm—they were quite unlike her; but most unlike was the little cry or call, louder than a moan, softer than a croak, that issued from her parted, yellow beak, which was so much less fearsome than his orange one.

She has never had to call for him before, I thought, and now he will not hear her.

There was nothing more to wait for; the air was turning cool; I had an irrational feeling that my clothes were wet. Stiffly I got up and climbed back to the house—my house, for it was mine after all: the swan had saved it for me. A moment's doubt remained: would the switch work? It did, and showed me what was still my own.

Two Poems



MASTER AND PUPIL (on a theme of Demetrios Capetanakis)

He shook the bandage from his snowing head,
Flooded with fire his hollow heart of stone.
It was as clear as blood, the neighbours said.
The old man had no children of his own.

When they both walked upon the sharp sea-shore,
He with his hand within the gold boy's breast,
The colours of the cock the winter wore,
The shot sun faltered in the flowing west.

We never can forget that sight, they cried.
Who would have thought of murder, the police?
It was as if, somehow, we all had spied
Some mentionable scene from Ancient Greece.

A Sunday paper printed all the facts,
Developing in paschal blood their day.
There was a front-page picture of the axe,
But all the innocence was wiped away.

No greater love has any man than this
That lays a friend's life down to save his own,
They murmur, sealing with a loving kiss
The cracked, cold body in its suit of stone.

He never spilt an atom of regret,
They sigh. *The boy shows no respect for death*
As on the striking day he hangs his debt,
Stands on the hour and sucks a last, strapped breath.

GRAVE BY THE SEA

By the crunching, Cornish sea
Walk the man and walk the lover
Innocent as fish that fare
In the high and hooking air
And their deaths discover.

Beneath, you said, this turning tree,
With granite eye and stare of sand
His heart as candid as the clay
A seaman from the stropping bay
Took to the land.

Once this calmed, crystal hand was free
And rang the changes of the heart:
Love, like his life, a world wherein
The white-worm sin wandered not in.
Death played no part.

Wreathed, and with ringing fingers he
Passed like a prince upon the day
And from its four and twenty towers
Shot with his shaft the haggard hours,
Hauled them away.

So he set from the shaken quay
His foot upon the ocean floor
And from the wanting water's teeth
The ice-faced gods above, beneath,
Spat him ashore.

Now in the speaking of the sea
He waits under this written stone,
And kneeling at his freezing frame
I scrub my eye to see his name

And read my own.

Arise and Eat



The end of the day, and I was driving back from the office, through the colourless air, the Indian warm-water air of summer and winter, morning and afternoon. Here one needs a watch more than in any other place; the air, the light give one no sign. One can't tell the time, it is all one. Even the people don't help. In the morning they look as tired as in the evening; and always as patiently dazed by the equal heat.

But today they seemed different. Even from my running car I could tell something was up. They looked vaguely anxious. As silent, but instead of sitting in groups under a tree, or on a patch of public lawn, they were standing up, each on his own, hovering on the edge of the road like absent-minded hitch-hikers. I caught a few blank gazes as I drove past.

The sky looks enormous in this very flat part of India. Now I seemed to be driving straight into it. Over the bridge and away from the city, towards the sands. It was then that I saw the clouds. Perhaps they meant rain. It was an off-rain season, and in a dry city people are afraid of the rain, which after its first few refreshing sheets of water, floods the town and melts down the mud huts.

Home and tea ahead of me. 'Sahib's tea': long easy-chair on the veranda, clean, starched manservant carrying a tray to the wicker side-table with the usual question: 'Will Sahib dine at home and when is bath required?'

At that time I was lucky. I lived in a small town, but in a large bungalow surrounded by a garden, which was in turn surrounded by several other bungalows with gardens. Ours was an island, an island of stone houses, tiled roofs, trees, running water, and people who looked clean. But on all sides we were closed in by swarming, steaming mud-huts, noisy, peppery bazaars, and the dusty streets. The contrast was so sharp that one could not take in both worlds at once. Most times it was the outer world, the filth, that was left out; but there were also times when it was the other way round, and our

green island suddenly became strangely unreal.

At that time this didn't bother me much. My walled garden afforded me a luxury which it is hard to get in India, privacy. I could walk about in it half-naked; I could sunbathe under the benedict palm-tree, when the sun was not too cruel. I like being on my own after an adolescence spent wedged in the midst of a large family.

It was a strange garden, compared to the tidy, civilized tapestries one finds in England. It was square, with a palm tree at each corner, as if nailing the precarious grass down. Only one tree was still green and growing; the other three were dead, erect trunks. There were also a few miserable papaya trees, and large shrubs with great, glossy, dark green leaves as hard as metal. The only dash of colour came from the purple bougainvillea on the wall, and an orange-coloured blossom called 'flame of the forest'. The flower beds were always carefully tended, and sometimes showed a few green shoots, but I had seldom actually seen them in blossom. I had been disappointed at first, after hearing so much about the 'exotic flora of the East'. But I got used to it. Once in a while I would find a single rose in a small glass on my breakfast tray—an offering from the gardener. That was the very most he could coax from the unreal garden.

On the whole I did not walk very much in my garden. It had a forbidden look, it was like a window-display behind a glass pane. This carefully matted lawn, it seemed a pity to tread on it. There was nothing to pick, and nothing to smell. Even the shade cast by the trees had a dusty quality. So I left it alone for the most part, alone in its struggle against the constant sun; and looked at it without seeing it from the veranda where I usually spent my evenings.

That evening I was reading to the sound of my worn-out gramophone records, and my mind was away. Perhaps to a real garden, or a real beach with a yellow sun that warms and envelops without desiccating. Once or twice I thought of the rain I had seen announced in the clouds, and believed even that might be a relief. But the sky had not darkened; the pale setting sun trickled undisturbed through the trellis on the veranda.

It was then that I noticed (very hazily, because I was in a state of pleasant stupor) that I could not listen to the music properly; there was a kind of interference. For a moment I thought the record-player was in worse condition than usual, or that this was a particularly frayed record. But I knew the interference had nothing to do with the music or the instrument; it was diffuse, it came from everywhere, it was below and above the music. It grew like the roar of a wave, and abruptly I ceased to hear the music, as if it had been turned off. The noise had taken over.

It was more than a noise, it was an immense sound, a din, a rumour as vast as the air that contained it. It was the sound of hundreds of human voices raised to a scream. It took me some time to recognize them as human. They could have been birds' voices, they were so shrill and strange.

Then there was another sound, quite distinct from the screams, even though it was very low. A faint whirring noise, pervasive like the voices, but steadier, more continuous. It could not be rain; rain patters, splashes, sighs. This was an entirely different thing, I had never heard it before. Yet the light had darkened in an unnatural way. I noticed that the pattern of squares made on the floor by the sun as it shone through the trellis had faded away.

I went and stood on the steps leading into the garden. Then I saw them. The locusts.

The air was full of them, made by them. The rooftops were locusts, the trees and the grass were locusts, the walls were locusts. You felt they were in your very head, behind your eyes. Instinctively I covered my face.

The screaming came from the household staff in the surrounding bungalows and my own house. It was intended to prevent the locusts from settling in the gardens. Locusts hate noise. They also hate smoke. Big fires were lit in the gardens from mounds of sun-baked leaves. The servants brought out kerosene cans, filled them with stones, and rattled them frantically. And then the screams.

Some locusts moved away, but millions more came. I saw some lying on the veranda steps: they were red, fat, rather like big prawns, tinged with yellow. Some were motionless, others crawled lazily about. Their noiselessness and purpose was far more terrifying than all the artificial noise of the humans.

I looked up, my eyes tried to break through the horrible teeming cloud. I could still see the houses and trees surrounding the garden, but only their outlines, their skeletons, as if through thick snow—brown snow. Only there was none of the quietness, the impression of suspended immobility which falling snow gives you. This cloud never stopped moving; to and fro, upwards and downwards, in circles and spirals, thickening and dispersing alternately. The sun was there, but I could look at it directly, without blinking.

One expects the air to be steamy or liquid with rain, but never solid, never with the solidity of actual life; moving, brutal, red.

Above the cloud of locusts, another army hovered: the birds of prey. Thousands of kites, vultures, crows, all the bird life of India which follows and feeds on the locusts while they are intent on their ravaging.

Nothing was left untouched. The air was filthy, the soil foul with layer upon layer of the creatures' siftings. The siftings were like squashed rotten mulberries, interspersed with dead locusts.

And in the midst of this horror the gardener struggled.

I had never noticed him much; he was a slow and silent man, unlike the other gossiping servants. During the idle hours of the afternoon, when the housework was over, I had never seen him among the others squatting cross-legged in the courtyard, joking and teasing each other. He went about his work slowly and methodically, filling his goatskin with water, emptying it. He worked like a camel at the water-wheel, day in, day out. Once or twice I had caught him just standing there motionless, staring hard at a patch of ground, as if trying to solve a difficult puzzle. We had hardly ever exchanged any conversation. He never came to me for my opinion, or to show off the results of his efforts. He wanted no thanks or praise from me; the birth of one more sickly flower was all he expected for his toil. I often felt he was not really working for me. It was just he and the garden, nothing else.

Now he was transformed. The shy shuffling man had turned into a dark maniac. He was practically naked, and looked skinnier than he actually was, because his limbs were so long. His thin arms wheeled in the air like propellers, his legs shot outward in frantic kicks. I could see his muscles, his panting ribs moving without stop through his spare flesh. As if the locusts had got into him, as if they were eating into his body and left him no peace. His body seemed to be wracked by some terrible pain. Whenever he saw a cluster of locusts landing on one of his flowers, he screamed, and it was like a scream from hell. He was no longer a methodical man: one moment he would pick up a tin and bang it with all his strength, the next he would drop it and pick up a large branch which he swept across the flower beds in a great violent movement. Then he would throw all his poor weapons to the ground, and start trampling on the layers of locusts in a frantic dance, his feet moving like drumsticks on a drum.

Sometimes I would lose sight of him. A sudden thickening in the swarm of locusts, or the woolly grey smoke from the burning leaves hid him from my eyes. Then suddenly he would appear again where I least expected him, he would burst in upon me, leaping over the fire, sailing through the smoke with arms outstretched, more demoniac than ever.

I could see nothing else in the garden except him; him and the locusts. Everything else was forgotten, became a background. Something terrible had emerged in my quiet garden this evening; a passion

had broken out, a passion was speaking and proving itself. The gardener was giving his plants all he had. The locusts brought no mortal danger with them, yet I felt a strong taste of death about me, gripping my throat; nothing cold or sinister, simply something very powerful, and absolute; perhaps it was because at this moment the gardener was ready for death.

Suddenly I saw him stop. He dropped his kerosene tin, which for the last time gave out a thin falsetto sound, a hollow tinkle. For a moment his branch swung faintly in his other hand, then he dropped that too. He remained quite motionless. His arms hung at his side, thin, sun-dried, immensely long they looked—and dead. His eyes were still wild, showing their whites like the eyes of a frightened horse, and his chest heaved with his torn breath. Then that too was still. He was wholly still, and almost indifferent. He was beaten. One or two locusts collided into his face in their heavy flight, but he only blinked, did not brush them away.

The other servants continued their banging and shouting, but they seemed unreal now, a little ridiculous. The gardener's defeat was the end of the world. Everyone was alone now; the pitiful stumps of flowers were alone, and even the locusts were frighteningly alone in their single-minded task.

I was frightened by the silence that emanated from the gardener, I was frightened by the silence in my mind; so I quickly summoned a sahib's thoughts: 'The gardener is beaten; he is used to being beaten; he has always had to submit to superior forces. He will get over it. It is nothing out of the ordinary really.'

It seemed that I was right, because after a while the gardener's body began to stir again. He will shuffle away, I thought, as he used to shuffle away every evening when his work was done. He will leave the stage, after having played his part, his tiny, tiny part.

But he did not leave. Altered, disguised, he remained. He picked up his kerosene can and emptied it of stones. Then, slightly stooping, with the stoop of the labourer and the petitioner, he began picking up locusts from the ground. He chose the fat ones, the whole ones, the best ones among the layers of squashed and dismembered insects. He filled his can and placed it carefully in a sheltered spot on the veranda, then got a second empty can. Deaf to the great din of the invaders, blind to disaster and fire, he went on with his job. His eyes were alive, attentive, full of a keen interest. He trod carefully. He selected and rejected, palped and scrutinized his prey, whose prey he had been some minutes ago. So now he was using the oldest weapon of all, the very first; he was using the very first way out; the great solution, natural, religious, economic. Eat your enemy! Make

his blood quicken the blood in your weakened veins! Take his life and make it your own!

When his second can was full, he turned away and left, indifferently before the show was even over.

The gardener dined well that night, and the following day as well.

While he gorged himself at his solitary feast, fresh waves of locusts came. But they were stragglers following the main pack, only a quarter of a square mile of them. They did not find much to eat. The garden was a cemetery of naked branches, with only a few old, bare leaves attached to them. The lawn went back to its natural yellow colour, camel-yellow and brown. In the already hot morning, the gardener stretched himself, with the insolence of a well-fed man, and rose to fetch his patched-up goatskin.

J. G. WARRY

Ghost Story



For close on forty years I have pursued
The ghost of my personality
Down endless corridors of a castle
Unsuccessfully.

If I could catch him, I wonder,
By the hem of his fading gown
Would he turn and show me a mystery
Or with a silent frown

Repudiate the beckoning finger
Which often at the angle of a stair
Invited me to a solemn tête-à-tête—
Always elsewhere?

When the clock is stirring the shadows
Anxiously I raise
My eyes to the darkened gallery,
Wondering if his face

Closely resembles my face.
And if in fact it does not,
Would I really care to confront him
In a lonely spot?

Who is the owner of the castle?
Is it the ghost or I?
And if the walls suddenly crumble
Under the night sky

Will the place still be haunted?
Or shall I stand alone
Beneath the moon, with the fragments
Of powdered stone?

George Gissing¹



In the shadow of the atomic bomb it is not easy to talk confidently about progress. However, if it can be assumed that we are *not* going to be blown to pieces in about ten years' time, there are many reasons, and George Gissing's novels are among them, for thinking that the present age is a good deal better than the last one. If Gissing were still alive he would be younger than Bernard Shaw, and yet already the London of which he wrote seems almost as distant as that of Dickens. It is the fog-bound, gas-lit London of the 'eighties, a city of drunken puritans, where clothes, architecture and furniture had reached their rock-bottom of ugliness, and where it was almost normal for a working-class family of ten persons to inhabit a single room. On the whole Gissing does not write of the worst depths of poverty, but one can hardly read his descriptions of lower-middle-class life, so obviously truthful in their dreariness, without feeling that we have improved perceptibly on that black-coated, money-ruled world of only sixty years ago.

Everything of Gissing's—except perhaps one or two books written towards the end of his life—contains memorable passages, and anyone who is making his acquaintance for the first time might do worse than start with *In the Year of the Jubilee*. It was rather a pity, however, to use up paper in reprinting two of his minor works when the books by which he ought to be remembered are and have been for years completely unprocurable. *The Odd Women*, for instance, is about as thoroughly out of print as a book can be. I possess a copy myself, in one of those nasty little red-covered cheap editions that flourished before the 1914 war, but that is the only copy I have ever seen or heard of. *New Grub Street*, Gissing's masterpiece, I have never succeeded in buying. When I have read it, it has been

¹ This article was originally commissioned for a magazine which came to an end before it could be published. It has only recently come to light again.

² *In the Year of the Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*. By George Gissing (Watergate Classics. 12s. 6d. each.)

in soup-stained copies borrowed from public lending libraries: so also with *Demos*, *The Nether World* and one or two others. So far as I know only *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the book on Dickens, and *A Life's Morning*, have been in print at all recently. However, the two now reprinted are well worth reading, especially *In the Year of the Jubilee*, which is the more sordid and therefore the more characteristic.

In his introduction Mr William Plomer remarks that 'generally speaking, Gissing's novels are about money and women', and Miss Myfanwy Evans says something very similar in introducing *The Whirlpool*. One might, I think, widen the definition and say that Gissing's novels are a protest against the form of self-torture that goes by the name of respectability. Gissing was a bookish, perhaps over-civilized man, in love with classical antiquity, who found himself trapped in a cold, smoky, Protestant country where it was impossible to be comfortable without a thick padding of money between yourself and the outer world. Behind his rage and querulousness there lay a perception that the horrors of life in late-Victorian England were largely unnecessary. The grime, the stupidity, the ugliness, the sex-starvation, the furtive debauchery, the vulgarity, the bad manners, the censoriousness—these things were unnecessary, since the puritanism of which they were a relic no longer upheld the structure of society. People who might, without becoming less efficient, have been reasonably happy chose instead to be miserable, inventing senseless tabus with which to terrify themselves. Money was a nuisance not merely because without it you starved; what was more important was that unless you had quite a lot of it—£300 a year, say—society would not allow you to live gracefully or even peacefully. Women were a nuisance because even more than men they were the believers in tabus, still enslaved to respectability even when they had offended against it. Money and women were therefore the two instruments through which society avenged itself on the courageous and the intelligent. Gissing would have liked a little more money for himself and some others, but he was not much interested in what we should now call social justice. He did not admire the working class as such, and he did not believe in democracy. He wanted to speak not for the multitude, but for the exceptional man, the sensitive man, isolated among barbarians.

In *The Odd Women* there is not a single major character whose life is not ruined either by having too little money, or by getting it too late in life, or by the pressure of social conventions which are obviously absurd but which cannot be questioned. An elderly spinster crowns a useless life by taking to drink; a pretty young girl

marries a man old enough to be her father; a struggling schoolmaster puts off marrying his sweetheart until both of them are middle-aged and withered; a good-natured man is nagged to death by his wife; an exceptionally intelligent, spirited man misses his chance to make an adventurous marriage and relapses into futility; in each case the ultimate reason for the disaster lies in obeying the accepted social code, or in not having enough money to circumvent it. In *A Life's Morning* an honest and gifted man meets with ruin and death because it is impossible to walk about a big town with no hat on. His hat is blown out of the window when he is travelling in the train, and as he had not enough money to buy another, he misappropriates some money belonging to his employer, which sets going a series of disasters. This is an interesting example of the changes in outlook that can suddenly make an all-powerful tabu seem ridiculous. Today, if you had somehow contrived to lose your trousers, you would probably embezzle money rather than walk about in your underpants. In the 'eighties the necessity would have seemed equally strong in the case of a hat. Even thirty or forty years ago, indeed, bare-headed men were booed at in the street. Then, for no very clear reason, hatlessness became respectable, and today the particular tragedy described by Gissing—entirely plausible in its context—would be quite impossible.

The most impressive of Gissing's books is *New Grub Street*. To a professional writer it is also an upsetting and demoralizing book, because it deals among other things with that much-dreaded occupational disease, sterility. No doubt the number of writers who suddenly lose the power to write is not large, but it is a calamity that *might* happen to anybody at any moment, like sexual impotence. Gissing, of course, links it up with his habitual themes—money, the pressure of the social code, and the stupidity of women.

Edwin Reardon, a young novelist—he has just deserted a clerkship after having a fluky success with a single novel—marries a charming and apparently intelligent young woman, with a small income of her own. Here, and in one or two other places, Gissing makes what now seems the curious remark that it is difficult for an educated man who is not rich to get married. Reardon brings it off, but his less successful friend, who lives in an attic and supports himself by ill-paid tutoring jobs, has to accept celibacy as a matter of course. If he did succeed in finding himself a wife, we are told, it could only be an uneducated girl from the slums. Women of refinement and sensibility will not face poverty. And here one notices again the deep difference between that day and our own. Doubtless Gissing is right in implying all through his books that intelligent women are very

rare animals; and if one wants to marry a woman who is intelligent and pretty, then the choice is still further restricted, according to a well-known arithmetical rule. It is like being allowed to choose only among albinos, and left-handed albinos at that. But what comes out in Gissing's treatment of his odious heroine, and of certain others among his women, is that at that date the idea of delicacy, refinement, even intelligence, in the case of a woman, was hardly separable from the idea of superior social status and expensive physical surroundings. The sort of woman whom a writer would want to marry was also the sort of woman who would shrink from living in an attic. When Gissing wrote *New Grub Street* that was probably true, and it could, I think, be justly claimed that it is not true today.

Almost as soon as Reardon is married it becomes apparent that his wife is merely a silly snob, the kind of woman in whom 'artistic tastes' are no more than a cover for social competitiveness. In marrying a novelist she has thought to marry someone who will rapidly become famous and shed reflected glory upon herself. Reardon is a studious, retiring, ineffectual man, a typical Gissing hero. He has been caught up in an expensive, pretentious world in which he knows he will never be able to maintain himself, and his nerve fails almost immediately. His wife, of course, has not the faintest understanding of what is meant by literary creation. There is a terrible passage—terrible, at least, to anyone who earns his living by writing—in which she calculates the number of pages that it would be possible to write in a day, and hence the number of novels that her husband may be expected to produce in a year—with the reflection that really it is not a very laborious profession. Meanwhile Reardon has been stricken dumb. Day after day he sits at his desk; nothing happens, nothing comes. Finally, in panic, he manufactures a piece of rubbish; his publisher, because Reardon's previous book had been successful, dubiously accepts it. Thereafter he is unable to produce anything that even looks as if it might be printable. He is finished.

The desolating thing is that if only he could get back to his clerkship and his bachelorhood, he would be all right. The hard-boiled journalist who finally marries Reardon's widow sums him up accurately by saying that he is the kind of man who, if left to himself, would write a fairly good book every two years. But, of course, he is not left to himself. He cannot revert to his old profession, and he cannot simply settle down to live on his wife's money: public opinion, operating through his wife, harries him into impotence and finally into the grave. Most of the other literary characters in the book are not much more fortunate, and the troubles that beset them are still very much the same today. But at least it is unlikely that

the book's central disaster would now happen in quite that way or for quite those reasons. The chances are that Reardon's wife would be less of a fool, and that he would have fewer scruples about walking out on her if she made life intolerable for him. A woman of rather similar type turns up in *The Whirlpool* in the person of Alma Frothingham. By contrast there are the three Miss Frenches in *The Year of the Jubilee*, who represent the emerging lower-middle class — a class which, according to Gissing, was getting hold of money and power which it was not fitted to use — and who are quite surprisingly coarse, rowdy, shrewish and unmoral. At first sight Gissing's 'lady-like' and 'unladylike' women seem to be different and even opposite kinds of animal, and this seems to invalidate his implied condemnation of the female sex in general. The connecting link between them, however, is that all of them are miserably limited in outlook. Even the clever and spirited ones, like Rhoda in *The Odd Women* (an interesting early specimen of the New Woman), cannot think in terms of generalities, and cannot get away from readymade standards. In his heart Gissing seems to feel that women are natural inferiors. He wants them to be better educated, but on the other hand, he does not want them to have freedom, which they are certain to misuse. On the whole the best women in his books are the self-effacing, home-keeping ones.

There are several of Gissing's books that I have never read, because I have never been able to get hold of them, and these unfortunately include *Born in Exile*, which is said by some people to be his best book. But merely on the strength of *New Grub Street*, *Demos* and *The Odd Women* I am ready to maintain that England has produced very few better novelists. This perhaps sounds like a rash statement until one stops to consider what is meant by a novel. The word 'novel' is commonly used to cover almost any kind of story — *The Golden Asse*, *Anna Karenina*, *Don Quixote*, *The Improvisatore*, *Madame Bovary*, *King Solomon's Mines* or anything else you like — but it also has a narrower sense in which it means something hardly existing before the nineteenth century and flourishing chiefly in Russia and France. A novel, in this sense, is a story which attempts to describe credible human beings, and — without necessarily using the technique of naturalism — to show them acting on everyday motives and not merely undergoing strings of improbable adventures. A true novel, sticking to this definition, will also contain at least two characters, probably more, who are described from the inside and on the same level of probability — which, in effect, rules out the novels written in the first person. If one accepts this definition, it becomes apparent that the novel is not an art-form in which England has

excelled. The writers commonly paraded as 'great English novelists' have a way of turning out either to be not true novelists, or not to be Englishmen. Gissing was not a writer of picaresque tales, or burlesques, or comedies, or political tracts: he was interested in individual human beings, and the fact that he can deal sympathetically with several different sets of motives, and make a credible story out of the collision between them, makes him exceptional among English writers.

Certainly there is not much of what is usually called beauty, not much lyricism, in the situations and characters that he chooses to imagine, and still less in the texture of his writing. His prose, indeed, is often disgusting. Here are a couple of samples:

Not with impunity could her thought accustom itself to stray in regions forbidden, how firm soever her resolve to hold bodily aloof. (*The Whirlpool.*)

The ineptitude of uneducated English women in all that relates to their attire is a fact that it boots not to enlarge upon. (*In the Year of the Jubilee.*)

However, he does not commit the faults that really matter. It is always clear what he means, he never 'writes for effect', he knows how to keep the balance between récit and dialogue and how to make dialogue sound probable while not contrasting too sharply with the prose that surrounds it. A much more serious fault than his inelegant manner of writing is the smallness of his range of experience. He is only acquainted with a few strata of society, and, in spite of his vivid understanding of the pressure of circumstance on character, does not seem to have much grasp of political or economic forces. In a mild way his outlook is reactionary, from lack of foresight rather than from ill-will. Having been obliged to live among them, he regarded the working class as savages, and in saying so he was merely being intellectually honest; he did not see that they were capable of becoming civilized if given slightly better opportunities. But, after all, what one demands from a novelist is not prophecy, and part of the charm of Gissing is that he belongs so unmistakably to his own time, although his time treated him badly.

The English writer nearest to Gissing always seems to be his contemporary, or near-contemporary, Mark Rutherford. If one simply tabulates their outstanding qualities, the two men appear to be very different. Mark Rutherford was a less prolific writer than Gissing, he was less definitely a novelist, he wrote much better prose, his books belong less recognizably to any particular time, and he was in outlook a social reformer and, above all, a puritan. Yet there is a sort of haunting resemblance, probably explained by the fact that

both men lack that curse of English writers, a 'sense of humour.' A certain low-spiritedness, and air of loneliness, is common to both of them. There are, of course, funny passages in Gissing's books but he is not chiefly concerned with getting a laugh—above all, he has no impulse towards burlesque. He treats all his major characters more or less seriously, and with at least an attempt at sympathy. Any novel will inevitably contain minor characters who are mere grotesques or who are observed in a purely hostile spirit, but there is such a thing as impartiality, and Gissing is more capable of it than the great majority of English writers. It is a point in his favour that he had no very strong moral purpose. He had, of course, a deep loathing of the ugliness, emptiness and cruelty of the society he lived in, but he was concerned to describe it rather than to change it. There is usually no one in his books who can be pointed to as the villain, and even when there is a villain he is not punished. In his treatment of sexual matters Gissing is surprisingly frank, considering the time at which he was writing. It is not that he writes pornography or expresses approval of sexual promiscuity, but simply that he is willing to face the facts. The unwritten law of English fiction, the law that the hero as well as the heroine of a novel should be virgin when married, is disregarded in his books, almost for the first time since Fielding.

Like most English writers subsequent to the mid-nineteenth century, Gissing could not imagine any desirable destiny other than being a writer or a gentleman of leisure. The dichotomy between the intellectual and the lowbrow already existed, and a person capable of writing a serious novel could no longer picture himself as fully satisfied with the life of a business-man, or a soldier, or a politician, or what-not. Gissing did not, at least consciously, even want to be the kind of writer that he was. His ideal, a rather melancholy one, was to have a moderate private income and live in a small comfortable house in the country, preferably unmarried, where he could wallow in books, especially the Greek and Latin classics. He might perhaps have realized this ideal if he had not managed to get himself into prison immediately after winning an Oxford scholarship: as it was he spent his life in what appeared to him to be hackwork, and when he had at last reached the point where he could stop writing against the clock, he died almost immediately, aged only about forty-five. His death, described by H. G. Wells in his *Experiment in Autobiography*, was of a piece with his life. The twenty novels, or thereabouts, that he produced between 1880 and 1900 were, so to speak, sweated out of him during his struggle towards a leisure which he never enjoyed and which he might not have used to good

advantage if he had had it: for it is difficult to believe that his temperament really fitted him for a life of scholarly research. Perhaps the natural pull of his gifts would in any case have drawn him towards novel-writing sooner or later. If not, we must be thankful for the piece of youthful folly which turned him aside from a comfortable middle-class career and forced him to become the chronicler of vulgarity, squalor and failure.

THE NEXT NUMBER

The London Magazine

Vol. 7, Number 7, will be out at the beginning of July, and will contain among other contributions

A NEW ENGLISH THEATRE?

A Symposium with contributions by

John Arden

Ronald Duncan

Jeremy Kingston

Norman Marshall

Alan Pryce-Jones

Robert Shaw

Caspar Wrede

Elegy



What good is an old man to the sea?
Gone, gone is death by water.
Death is what the sea is. Only
Death can be as lonely.

An old man calls an old boat ship,
Paints it a brave sun-dancing yellow.
World is what a ship is. Only
World can be as lonely.

Death on the water is a thing
Different from death by drowning.
Fire and air turn enemies. Only
Man can be as lonely.

An old man on the sea at night
Lost, gone the glow of yellow.
Life is what the eye sees. Only
Life can be as lonely,

An old man moving with the tide
Lights a rag of fire on water.
Hand is what a man is. Only
Man can be as lonely.

For flame could echo, call a flame—
Image is answer and not drowning.
Man is what his flesh is, lonely.
Man is that thing only.

ELEGY

And old men on the sea at night
Light fires to be seen and saved,
Leastways be warm and seeing; that's to
Live and not be lonely.

Only, old men have shaky hands.
Captains never turn to water.
Drink is what the sea is; bravely,
Captains drink bright yellow.

But what's an old man to the sea?
Fire can spill like oil or water.
Quick is what a fire is. Only,
Man can be so lonely

That elements will scorch and sting—
Air and water, earth and yellow.
Alien as fire-light lonely,
Death is that fact only.

Old man, old man, all gone, all gone.
Old to live and live for drowning.
Yellow charred wood, lonely,
Touching the wide sea, only.

Explorations and Recoveries—II

Symons, Yeats and the Demonic Dance



saltavit et placuit

In the early 1920s, in one of his autobiographical fantasias, Ford Madox Ford made this high claim for the influence of Arthur Symons on what was then the 'forward' movement in English poetry:

Consider the gap there would be in a whole *genre*, if Mr Symons had never written. I might call him, rather than myself, the doyen of free verse.

Ford is always a dubious oracle; but, as the former editor of the influential *English Review*, and as a man who had himself lived through the gap he was talking of, the gap in English poetry between late Pre-Raphaelitism and early Imagism, he could speak, in this instance, with some authority. Like all men who live through such a gap, Ford could feel it, but not explain it; though he instinctively, and rightly, felt that Symons's influence supplied a hidden continuity. We on the other hand have not lived through the gap, but, historically distant from it, feel we can explain it. But such a feeling of objective historical understanding is to some extent illusory, for we are still under the influence of two very powerfully charged versions of the story. In an essay on *Baudelaire in Our Own Time*, Mr Eliot pays generous tribute to Symons's understanding of French symbolism, but he suggests that Symons was unable to profit, in his own poetic practice, by that critical insight. Mr Eliot's early vigorous propaganda for the metaphysicals also disguised the degree in which, both in his poetry and criticism, he was interpreting the metaphysicals in a symbolist manner, almost in Symons's own manner; his early poems in quatrains are not, like metaphysical poems, imitations of argument, even sophisticated argument; their manner of

procedure is symbolist; and in later, more unbuttoned pieces, Mr Eliot had admitted his strong personal debt as a young poet to Symons and other quasi-symbolist and impressionist poets of the 1890s. Mr Eliot has misled us in one way; Yeats misleads us in another.

Our present interest in the 1890s is largely due to the fact that Yeats, a very great poet indeed, was in a sense formed by that decade, survived it and beautifully commemorated it. We treat the sections in the *Autobiographies* on the 1890s not merely as great art in prose, as aesthetic modulation of history, but as document; in a sense we are right to do so, for Yeats, unlike many authors of literary memoirs, was not a deliberate liar and factually the *Autobiographies* are surprisingly accurate. Yet two quotations give the essential clue to his method: 'It needs the wild mystical parts to lift it out of gossip'; and, 'I study every man I meet at some point of crisis—I alone have no crisis.' He shows, for instance, Wilde and Henley, Beardsley, Johnson and Dowson, aesthetes or activists, saints *manqués* or crippled imperialists, mock-aristocrats and mock-tramps, held at a moment of intolerable tension. Symons was still alive when he wrote; Symons's life was not obviously dramatic and is given muted treatment. Yeats does, however, full justice to the dialogue of ideas and personalities between him and Symons in the five years when they were closely associated; yet he appreciated Symons because Symons was, for him, a feminine, receptive personality; a conductor of ideas. He never quite treats Symons as a person or a poet in his own right; if he praises anything, it is Symons's translations from the French, which he saw as extensions of Symons's great gift for making immediately current the latest forces in other European literatures. So Yeats gives us, at the best, a partial version of Symons, as he gives us a partial version of the other actors of 'the tragic generation'; though no one will ever give us versions that are more vivid. We will probably go on quoting the *Autobiographies* to clinch a point: not seeing that they themselves have figmented the point we are clinching.

Eliot and Yeats between them have contrived to create a 'set picture' of the 1890s as a whole, and of the role of Symons in that decade; they unconsciously conspire together to remove Symons from the centre of the picture, except in so far as he was a critic, and especially except in so far as his *Symbolist Movement in Literature* had a formative effect on Yeats and Eliot; it underlies Yeats's *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903) and if Eliot had not read it round about 1909, when he was a student at Harvard, he would not have gone into Boston to buy Laforgue. It would be easy to counter-

act the fashionable view of the 1890s as an unhealthy egg, out of which Yeats managed to burst, with some equally hollow generalisation; but the best way to disturb this lazy attitude, to reduce Ford's 'gap', is by producing some local and modest but (I hope) suggestive evidence.

What I want to do in this essay is to exemplify three things. There is a fourth thing beyond my particular scope, which I shall mention and let go. The first thing is that Symons bridges the gap between Browning and Mr Eliot, by having written at least one poem which owes a great deal to Browning's dramatic monologues but also a great deal to the manner of procedure of Laforgue; it is a poem halfway between *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, say, and *Portrait of a Lady*. The second point is a movement in Symons's poetic work from naturalism through a poetic equivalent of French impressionism in painting to something that faintly begins to suggest the Imagism of Hulme and the Ezra Pound of *Lustra*. (The fourth thing is that in the 1890s Symons attempts to use Donne, Donne's sexual frankness and Donne's conversational ease, but without any real success.) More broadly, I want to suggest that the dialogue between Symons and Yeats was not restricted to critical doctrines and attitudes, but that they had an equally fruitful effect on one another's poetry. I shall examine this relationship rather narrowly in terms of the symbol of the dancer, and in particular of the fable of the conjunct *persona* Salome-Herodias and St John the Baptist's head, suggesting that it is in one of Symons's poems that we find the main source of Yeats's preoccupation with the image.

Between Symons and Yeats there are certain plain biographical affinities. Like Yeats, his exact contemporary, Symons was a largely self-educated Celt who revolted against his father's beliefs; but where Yeats reacted from positivism into occultism, Symons found another variety of 'literary' faith: the impressionism of Pater's *Renaissance*. Symons's father, a minister, had been on circuit in Cornwall and Wales, and Symons himself grew up in a hectic atmosphere of religious revivalism and sentimental nationalism. But, unlike Yeats, Symons was never to find in nationalism a creative force: he was essentially a rootless man, at home in any part of the world because he belonged to none; but more at home certainly in London and Paris than in a Celtic world of political histrionics. If Yeats's career can be seen as the successful attempt to control a successive set of identities, Symons is a poet who failed in the search for a single identity.

Much of Symons's work can be grasped in terms of tensions

between his early revivalism (vividly depicted in *Seaward Lackland*, one of the exercises in autobiographical exploration contained in *Spiritual Adventures*, that were themselves part of his search for an identity) and impressionism; between naturalism and the occultism of Yeats in the years when they particularly associated. Symons rejected revivalism, for its group fervours were related to that 'meta-physics' Pater had taught him to distrust. This rejection marked the first stage of his alienation: *Seaward Lackland*, the young Methodist lay preacher in *Spiritual Adventure* never actually dedicates himself to God in the sight of the community, but oppressed by the sense of sin determines to cut himself off from man and God by committing the unnamed sin against the Holy Ghost, though insisting that his action is determined by love of God: a parable of the poet as rebel mystic.

Basing his life on Pater's *Renaissance* was to intensify Symons's isolation and self-consciousness. The impressionist pays a high price for the freedom of aesthetic intensity: all sense of neighbourliness, of life beyond the veil, is dissolved: 'each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world'. For Pater, the only vehicle of communication lay in the senses, for they were all that men possessed in common, and it was finally through Anglo-Catholic ritual that he had attempted to redeem himself from the 'flux'. Symons was not attracted to high ecclesiastical gestures: the 'flux' with its evasive glitter absorbed him, and the dance, stylized, self-conscious, provocative, came to represent for him the perfect emblem of life in the modern city, for it dramatized his own isolation. Yet through his association with Yeats, the dance later became for Symons not spectacle merely, but participation, and, in some sense, religious.

It was towards naturalism that Symons first reacted and this note dominates his first book of poems, *Days and Nights* (1889). The themes here are mainly contemporary and urban. Symons enjoys extreme situations and his experience of nonconformity provides material that is treated in the melodramatic spirit of Henry Arthur Jones. Elsewhere, he indulges in the religious pornography his non-conformist background made voluptuous for him: a woman pleads before the crucifix and then resigns herself to her lover's embraces; in *Red Bradbury's End*, a dying man is anxious to see a minister, but his son will not allow it, for that would involve the confession of a murder in which both father and son are implicated. That Symons should turn to prose because of such psychological casuistries, was one of Pater's suggestions in a review of *Days and Nights* largely through doubts about the capacity of modern poets to control

contemporary data. *Vie de Bohème*, however, is one of Symons's successes in precisely that field.

..... The pink light flickered, and a shadow ran
 Along the ground as couples came and went;
 The waltzing fiddles sounded from the tent,
 And *Giroflée* began.
 They sauntered arm in arm, these two; the smiles
 Grew chilly, as the best spring evenings do.
 The words were warmer, but the words came few,
 And pauses fell at whiles.
 But she yawned prettily. 'Come then,' said he.
 He found a chair, *Veuve Clicquot*, some cigars.
 They emptied glasses and admired the stars,
 The lanterns, night, the sea.
 Nature, the newest opera, the dog
 (So clever) who could shoulder arms and dance;
 He mentioned Alphonse Daudet's last romance,
 Last Sunday's river-fog,
 Love, Immortality; the talk ran down
 To these mere lees; they wearied each of each,
 And tortured ennui into hollow speech,
 And yawned, to hide a frown.
 She jarred his nerves: he bored her—and so soon.
 Both were polite, and neither cared to say
 The word that mars a perfect night of May.
 They watched the rising moon.

The shrug in the voice: 'the smiles/grew chilly as the best spring evenings do,' the confidence of tone, the suggestion of nuances, the ease of the topical references, all suggest the 'new' poetry of twenty years later. *Vie de Bohème* stands half-way between Browning and Eliot, and like the early Eliot owes something to Laforgue's *Complaintes* (1886). Still, though one admits all this, sentimentalized irony remains the note rather than Laforgue's cold frivolity: the values are not superbly mocked, other values are not suggested in Eliot's manner by trenchant omission.

In a prevalent naturalist context, another poem, *Flos Florum* (1887), strikingly prefigures Yeats's Rose poems of the 90s. Rhythm and vocabulary here are Yeatsian, though there is no symbolism and the moral is a Paterian *carpe diem*:

Poor Flower of Flowers, hoar Time is harsh with us
 Time that has made all Edens ruinous . . .
 Child, if thy mirror warns thee, heed it well . . .
 One sighs, For I have seen the privet pale,
 The roses perish and the lilies fail.
 Sigh not at all, but say (if worst be worst),
 In these last things shall men recall my first,
 Wondering, and as old age breaks down and bows
 The comely walls of my life's crumbling house . . .

In 1889, Symons paid his first visit to Paris and his second book *Silhouettes* (1892), as its title indicates, reveals a new approach to contemporary life: the black and white of poetry. By 1891, he had become a member of the Rhymers' Club and was on familiar terms with Yeats. Yeats's *Autobiographies* record one of Symons's remarks at this time: 'we are concerned only with impressions'; but the word is ambiguous. It looks back to Pater's *Conclusion* to the *Renaissance*; but when the poet applies the criteria of Pater's *Preface* the range of the word extends to something that suggests analogues from painting:

analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a fair personality in life, or a book, produces this impression . . . [the] end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue and noted it as a chemist notes some natural element.

Much of *Silhouettes* can be read as a delicate set of Paterian exercises in distinguishing appearance from reality; reality consisting simply in these 'beautiful changes', the chance integrities of light, colour and mood. What survive from *Silhouettes* are the images:

A bright train flashed with all its squares
 Of warm light where the bridge lay mistily.

Yet Symons cannot maintain this role of impassive recorder, like an imagist poet; he must comment, often banally, on the order invoked. It is only later that acute visual effects cohere with the creation of mood indirectly through rhythm, so that the poet can be present indirectly. For, by this time, Symons had begun to come under the influence of symbolism, in the sweeter and scaled down version of Verlaine, Verlaine's somnambulistic rhythms which promised the lyrical dissolution of that 'discourse' the Rhymers so detested. *Dieppe — Grey and Green* is one of the successful silhouettes and, dedicated to Sickert, attempts to reproduce that master's muted palette:

The grey-green stretch of sandy grass,
Indefinitely desolate;
A sea of lead, a sky of slate;
Already autumn in the air, alas!

One stark monotony of stone,
The long hotel, acutely white,
Against the after-sunset light
Withers grey-green, and takes the grass's tone.

Listless and endless it outlies,
And means, to you and me, no more
Than any pebble on the shore,
Or this indifferent moment as it dies.

Still, as Wilbur Urban remarked, Symons's grey 'epiphanies,' though sensed through a variety of scenes and actions, remain fatally subdued to the 'achromatic thinness of a mood'. The divination of beauty in odd places is limited by the narrowness of the temperament that divines.

London Nights (1895) is unified as a volume by the capital itself established as a fugitive set of aspects, made and remade every night and morning. Effect of civilized corruption, fog collaborates vividly with gaslamps hanging 'like rotting fruit' to produce a momentary illusion of the beautiful. Within this world, Symons searches for identity:

My life is like a music-hall
'Tis I that smoke this cigarette,
Lounge here, and laugh for vacancy,
And watch the dancers turn; and yet
It is my very self I see
Across the cloudy cigarette

His life was artificial enough at this time, with its constant play-going, visits to Music Halls, circular discussions of literature under the coved ceilings of smoky-crocketed public-houses. And the beauty of artifice and illusion out of doors had its counterparts within, for it is in *London Nights* that Symons's obsession with dancers and the dance begins. Yet the dance here is essentially a spectacle for solitary enjoyment, on the level of the 'fatal art of the acrobat'. *Javanese Dancers*, his first poem on this central topic, was written as early as 1889, after his first visit to Paris. The hypnotism of the dance is cleverly evoked through the metre:

Still, with fixed eyes, monotonously still,
 Mysteriously, with smiles, inanimate,
 With lingering feet that undulate,
 With sinuous fingers, spectral hands that thrill
 In measure while the gnats of music whirr,
 The little amber-coloured dancers move,
 Like painted idols seen to stir
 By the idolators in a magic grove.

though some sinister sacerdotalism is hinted at, it is with the routine
 holiness of the anthropologist.

It was during Symons's visit to Paris in 1892 that he discovered
 the European equivalents of these ritual dancers: Nini-Patte-en-l'Air,
 La Goulue, and La Mèlinite, with their ominous solipsist quality:

Enigmatically smiling
 Back to a shadow in the night.

but they are also valued for their 'science of concupiscence' and this
 excitingly contrasts with a self-analysing gravity. As a contemporary
 remarked:

Apparently (Symons) set out quite early in life to shock himself;
 and I cannot believe that he has ever failed. Indeed, I have seen him
 walking about Saint Martin's Lane in a mackintosh, shuddering
 at the depths he has discovered in his soul: a soul as deep as a soup-
 plate.

Symons was always trailing himself round corners to catch himself
 at some trivial vice, trying to assimilate himself to his own myth
 of the 90s, and he preserves a naïvely caressing attitude to the image
 of himself established at this time: a nocturnal beast let loose in the
 grand. His real position is rather the inverted sacramentalist's (he
 often writes on the theme of Amor as God of Death, 'the kiss of the
 house, gustation of God, and ingression into the divine shadow'
 quoted ironically or blasphemously with 'the little death' of physical
 love: there is perhaps some influence of Wagner's *Tristan*). This can
 be modulated whimsically:

Why is it, child, you choose to wear
 That artful 1830 air
 Of artfulness made artifice?
 To lure all lips to long to kiss

The saint-like halo of your hair
 If those calm eyes, if that pure cheek,
 If this soft haloed hair could speak
 The false, fantastic, final truth,
 In some remote remembered youth
 I loved Gavarni for a week.

Yet it is not merely mock-innocence with lubricious gestures that excites Symons. In an article written in 1897, he associates his Parisian dancers with the decadent myth of *chute* and *finis latinorum*. Nini Patten-l'Air's cold art transforms her into 'a Maenad of the Decadence', as she dances with 'a sort of learned fury'. Yet she is hardly a Maenad, for her art is painfully erudite, it is not 'free' in the same sense as the dancing of Jane Avril or Loie Fuller. Although he refers to Jane Avril, Symons shows little interest in Loie Fuller (for Yeats the representative dancer of the poetic image); he prefers ballet with its cross-flare of gaslights and footlights, its painted figures and its diaphanous but somewhat mechanical order (the dancers of Degas rather than those of Moreau). Ballet's illusion mimics the illusion of life. But the 'free' dancer does not depend on scenery, music, dramatic interest; she depends merely on her own body, and her dance can be readily associated with possession by god or demon. To admire the 'free' dance is to pass from 'decadent' admiration of artifice to the symbolist recognition of Mallarmé's 'l'incorporation visuelle de l'idée'.¹ From a frivolous spectacle, the dance was transformed for Symons into something quasi-religious. Forces other than Symbolism tended in this direction.

In England, Symons was a devotee of the Alhambra and the Empire Music Halls, and like several of his fellow Rhymers fell in love with various ballet-girls (Symons's love-affairs were generally conducted on strict Baudelarian principles: the girl was cast according to type as Eros Noir or the Uranian Venus). The ballet-girls' custom was to meet the Rhymers at the Crown public-house after their performance and somewhat incongruously the group would include the Reverend Stewart Headlam, Fabian, Anglo-Catholic, and founder of the Church and Stage Guild. The Guild's purpose was to study theatrical dancing and publicize it as a moral and religious activity. As a sacramentalist Headlam insisted on the sacredness and antiquity of the dance, regarding the art as a form of union with God and appealing to the danced liturgies of the primitive church. For Headlam, dance

¹ Professor F. Kermode's fundamental essay *Romantic Image* provides the context of these remarks. I should like also to thank Mr J. B. Trapp of the Warburg Institute for help with the biography of Salome.

perhaps more than all other arts is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, ordained by the Word of God himself [he is referring to Matthew xi. 17: 'We have piped unto ye, and ye have not danced'], which has suffered more than all the other arts from the utter-anti-sacramentalism of British philistia. . . . Your Manichaeian Protestant, your superfine Rationalist, reject the dance as worldly, frivolous, sensual. . . . Your Sacramentalist knows something worth more than both of these. What perhaps the Dancer herself may be partially unconscious of, that we live now by faith and not by sight, and that the poetry of motion is the expression of an unseen spiritual grace.

And Headlam continues by quoting two lines from T. G. Hake: 'She fling her being into the dance' and 'None dare interpret all her limbs express'. Here is a clear parallel with the symbolist 'free' dance: but the parallels with twentieth-century versions of symbolism are as clear. The Church and Stage Guild regarded ballet and the Music Hall as social no less than religious art. In John Todhunter's *A Comedy of Sighs* (1894), a Church and Stage Guild Curate remarks:

It's out of the Music Hall the drama of the future must come . . .
the drama of the working man.

All this Mr Eliot was to remember, and in the 1920s he was to refer to 'dance at its finest, by which I mean High Mass at the Madeleine'. Dance and Music Hall both perform something of the function of the image in Symbolist aesthetic: they unite classes, if not races and creeds.

In the ambiance of these ideas and his close association with Yeats in the later nineties, Symons came to describe the dance as:

that natural madness . . . men were once wise enough to include
. . . in religion. It began with the worship of the disturbing deities,
the gods of ecstasy for whom energy passing into excess is sacred.

and in *The Turning Dervish* (1902) he writes:

I turn until my sense,
Dizzied with waves of air,
Swims to a point intense
And spires and centres there . . .
Till with excessive love,
I drown, and am in God.

The dialogue between Yeats and Symons became intense in the years between 1895 and 1900: the two were never to see as much of each other again. These are the years of *The Savoy* (in which Yeats collaborated), of *The Symbolist Movement*, of Symons's visit to Ireland in Yeats's company. Some of Symons's poems of this period show clear traces of his friend's manner; but the relationship was a dialogue; and in others we catch evident tones of what was to be Yeats's later voice, in his middle years:

O, why is it that a curl
Or the eyelash of a girl,
Or a ribbon from her hair,
Or a glove she used to wear,
Weighed with all a man has done,
With a thought or with a throne,
Drops the balance like a stone?

That dates from 1905. But in 1896, in *Perfect Grief*, Symons anticipates the Yeatsian technique of the dramatized quarrel with the self:

The wandering, wise, outcast sons
Of Pharaoh, the dark roofless ones,
Taught me this wisdom: If Death come,
And take thy dear one, be thou dumb,
Nor gratify with suppliant breath
The attentive insolence of Death.
Suffer thy dear one to depart
In silence; silent in thy heart,
From this forth, be thy dear one's name.
So I, that would not put to shame
So dear a memory dead, repeat
No more the sweet name once too sweet,
Nor from that buried name, remove
The haughty silence of my love.

The epithets are those Yeats was to use when he wished to express approval of aristocratic excess; words like 'haughty' and 'insolent'. We are once more with the poet of *Responsibilities*.

It cannot be proved that Yeats was influenced by such poems (Their existence, however, is further reason for casting doubt on current views about Yeats's 'transformation' into a modern poet.) But in Symons's *Dance of the Daughters of Herodias*, written in 1897,

we can watch the relationship at work; and the conjunction is very significant. In this poem, Symons's dancers are transfigured: he passes from the Music Hall or simple spectacle of the ritual dance. We now have an ambitious attempt to present the Dance as a composite image: of the poet's situation; of the predicament of a society which had rejected his wisdom; of the dancer as at once fascinating and terrible; warning and epiphany at once. (Symons was the more ready to reject his previous image of the dancer as cheery girl from the chorus: one of his love affairs with a ballet-girl had proved more self-involving than expected.)

The step could surely not have been made without Yeats. Symons's poem depends on notions that he must have learned from his friend. For while Symons was familiarizing Yeats with French symbolist texts, he was himself being instructed by his friend in 'mysticism' — that occult tradition that underlies Symbolism (a letter of Yeats in this same year refers to Symons's interest in the subject). And from unpublished correspondence between the two of them we gather that the Preface to *The Symbolist Movement* contains the substance of their discussion of 'mysticism'. Yeats had come to believe that all the Gods were masks of the one truth (an ancient idea expressed in the syncretistic rituals of The Golden Dawn) and at the same time Symons was confirming this in another way by placing the Irish Literary Movement as part of an international movement for the recovery of the Symbol that was to unite a fallen and divided world. It can only have been through Yeats that Symons, working in such a vein, learned of the daughters of Herodias. He knew of Salome — who did not — though he had not before seen his various dancers as versions of this most familiar dance: favoured by Moreau, Flaubert, Wilde, Beardsley and others. But in this poem, Salome's dance has the terrible general significance, the note of a move in the world, apocalypse, that can only be given by conflating Salome or her mother with more powerful creatures. In 1893, Yeats had published *The Hosting of the Sidhe*, which he was to use as the opening poem of *The Wind Among The Reeds* (1899) and which expresses that sense of omen pervading the volume, both in connexion with personal and general situations. In 1899, he states that these beautiful destructive spirits of the wind are associated with Herodias and her dance:¹ in a note he refers to 'Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old Goddess.' At a time when his occult studies were impressing on him that all the Gods were one, it is not unlikely that Yeats read Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*, which appeared in English in the 1880s. Grimm traces the story of these destructive angels of the air

In 1893, Lionel Johnson wrote a poem on this topic, *The Red Wind*.

in the folk lore of many nations, including the Irish, and gives source for the conflation of the patristic tradition of Herodias with folk lore; the legend of Herodias's love for John being transferred to her daughter. Grimm refers to Salome (Herodias) attempting to kiss the Baptist's mouth, while the Saint's disembodied head blows her back and whirls her round the sky. And Herodias is associated by Grimm with Diana as Hecate, in her virginal malignant aspect, as huntress of souls and with tree-worship, 'haunting the oaks by night like an aerial Lamia.

Yeats must have told Symons of this. And through the symbolic extensions that Yeats made available, the history of Symons's concern with the dance achieves its widest reference. But it is in turn through this poem that Salome, and all that accompanies her, enters Yeats's own work. It is in this poem for the first time that we meet the dancer with the severed head associated with the tree: the epiphany shown as rooted in life. Its opening relates it to the eschatological Rose poems Yeats was writing in the 90s to indicate the first trembling of the Veil of the Temple.

Is it the petals falling from the rose?
 For in the silence I can hear the sound
 Nearer than mine own heart-beat, such a word
 As roses murmur, blown by a great wind.
 I see a pale and windy multitude
 Beaten about the air, as if the smoke
 Of incense kindled into visible life
 Shadowy and invisible presences;
 And, in the cloudy darkness, I can see
 The thin white feet of many women dancing,
 And in their hands . . . I see it is the dance
 Of the daughters of Herodias; each of them
 Carries a beautiful platter in her hand,
 Smiling, because she holds against her heart
 The secret lips and the unresting brow
 Some John the Baptist's head makes lamentable;
 Smiling, as innocently as if she carried
 A wet, red quartered melon on a dish . . .
 Here is Salome . . . She is a young tree
 Swaying in the wind; her arms are slender branches . . .
 Her narrow feet are rooted in the ground.
 But, when the dim wind passes over her,
 Rustlingly she awakens, as if life
 Thrilled in her body to its finger tips.

..... And she leans
 Forward as if she followed, her wide eyes
 Swim open, her lips seek . . .

the poet ends with the same prayer as Yeats in *The Rose*: that the eternal beauty will not come too near, lest he grow mad, drowning in its excess.

Dance in the desolate air,
 Dance always, daughters of Herodias,
 With your eternal, white, unfaltering feet.
 But dance, I pray you, so that I from far
 May hear your dancing fainter than the drift
 Of the last petals falling from the rose.

It is to this eschatological aspect of the Dancer, Yeats returns in 1919:

Herodias' daughters have returned again,
 A sudden blast of dusty wind, and after
 Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
 Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind:
 And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
 All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,
 According to the wind, for all are blind.

In Symons's poem, tree mutates into dancer; her eyes open dreamily, but cannot flare with the incandescence of 'that brightening glance' in *Among Schoolchildren* that triumphantly consumes all deceiving myths. *The Daughters of Herodias* ends in nostalgic inconclusion: for Symons the dancer was always distinguished from the dance. He could get no farther than this: it was left to Yeats to absorb and recreate the image. Yet Symons's influence on Yeats extended beyond the 1890s and the more we examine Symons's work, the more we realize that the 1890s are not, as they are commonly supposed to be, a self-enclosed period, but a continuum which must be re-enacted if we are to 'distance' the 'modern' movement in English poetry.

The sad later history of Symons is the sad iteration of old themes: he could never get beyond what he had learned in the 1890s. In the Autumn of 1908, he suffered his own 'crack-up', so identifying himself with the 'Tragic Generation' whose legend he had helped to create, and all development was at an end. That delicate mechanism, so long engaged in distinguishing reality from appearance, now helplessly confused them. His account of his amnesia and flight,

Confessions, is one of the classics of madness (particularly as it appeared in *Life and Letters*, purified by Desmond MacCarthy of its literary incrustations). Even in the labyrinths of madness, as Yeats remarks in one of his letters, Symonds talked sanely of literature. And in the mental hospital, he was hounded still by his dancers: a learned Greek professor confined there would exhaust himself with Dionysiac leaps and monotonous stamping, which he insisted was the rhythm of the angels. When Symonds emerged, after a year and a half's confinement, only his past was left to him; his work became a protracted parasitism on that past and in 1920 he reverted to the theme of the dancer for the last time in faded tones. Yet though criticism will have its icy points against his work, the wreckage is full of glittering hints.

Correspondence



Sir,

Attacking my attitude towards Soviet literature, Mr Conquest accuses me of 'preaching a facile contentment to those under the harrow', and of displaying a 'see-no-evil attitude'. I am further charged with condoning the 'bullying of the authors'.

Bearing in mind the possibility that Mr Conquest really did read my article, his response seems astonishingly irrelevant. I made it abundantly clear that I do not subscribe to state interference with the arts, and merely pointed out that conditions had improved in this respect in post-Stalin Russia. Even Mr Conquest would be hard-pressed to deny this. I did not claim that bureaucratic interference had vanished, and I wrote of the 'continued existence of the mailed fist'. Anyone who had read his letter and not my article might be surprised to learn that I was discussing moral attitudes in literature, and not extolling the liberalism of the Soviet Government.

One can argue endlessly, as Mr Conquest would like to do, as to what form of society prevails in contemporary Russia: state capitalism? dictatorship of the proletariat (or party or technocracy)? co-operative socialism? But this is barely relevant to my point that communism is not only a system of government but also an attitude of mind within the individual, entailing a rooting out of certain acquisitive impulses, such as those of the food-speculators on whom Mr Conquest focuses in his *Common Sense about Russia*. I quoted Dementiev's novel as casting a particularly vivid light on this problem and not, as Mr Conquest infers, to prove that the Soviet State had attained any particular stage of development. A virtue I stressed was sympathy with the aims of skilled manual labour (Mr Conquest merely quibbles over my use of the word 'industrial': clearly Russian writers have concerned themselves with the peasant as well as the urban workers).

Mr Conquest argues that this type of writing is only produced under party direction, and that the 'orthodox literature is simply a fraud'. Dissenting from this, I am characterized as a 'keen mythologist and abstraction-lover', presumably having read Marx one day, swallowed the poisonous draft, and walked in a trance ever since.

Mr Conquest asks why I called his anthology *Back to Life* des-

tructive. That is easy to explain. Although this was one of the first volumes of East European poetry to be put out by a British publishing house, Mr Conquest frankly threw all poetic pretensions overboard in his translations, sacrificing art to doubtful political propaganda. We find Kirsanov's *Seven Days of the Week*, for example, truncated into a confused, abridged translation. Mr Conquest claims that the poems selected have 'documentary' value. Yet Margarita Aliger, writing of her poem *The Truth* (*Soviet Literature*, March 1960), is forced to complain: 'Where did the translator get the information that my hero "lost his job"? I did not write anything of the sort.' She further inquires why the last two lines of her fourteen line poem *From My Notebook* were omitted, thus changing 'the entire essence of the poem'.

One wonders how this testament is to be measured against Mr Conquest's declaration that his principle of selection 'did not in fact omit any representation of verse of interest or quality'. Why, then, did he publish only a few stanzas of Evtushenko's poems and not even whole passages, just bits of verse? Margarita Aliger further reminds Mr Conquest that despite criticisms of her work, some of which she accepted, some of which she did not, her poems before and since have never been denied publication. His statement that she was 'removed in hysterics in March 1957 from a meeting of Moscow writers' she denounces as simply untrue.

Mr Conquest's basic antithesis between commitment to the party line on the one hand and to 'truth and life' on the other, far from fostering our understanding of Soviet literature, merely retards it. The great problem today is how to render praise for certain Soviet attitudes without being branded as a commissar in disguise, a secret lackey of Moscow or merely one who read Marx and then closed his eyes for good. Let it be said that when Margarita Aliger condemns some of her own work as 'unhistorical' I am as profoundly disturbed by this incongruous determinism as anyone else. Historical determinism is not one of my pet mythologies.

But this is not to imply a retreat from my contention that much Soviet writing displays a deeper social morality than does our own. Mr Conquest's destructive approach and obsession with state interference does nobody a service.

All Souls College, Oxford

David Caute

Sir,

Hilary Corke's article on metre gave me a good deal of pleasure and I am very grateful for it.

Will you allow me to add two observations which may strengthen

CORRESPONDENCE

the primary consideration of the damage to poets themselves? Although we are all agreed that a poem cannot be fully realized unless it is heard, it is extraordinarily difficult to find anyone who can, or will, read poetry unless in the 'poetry voice' or in an intolerable and dreary singsong. The art of subduing the voice to the movement and logic of the line is not one that our readers feel themselves called on to acquire. Recordings of particularly difficult poets—Hopkins, for instance—are often ludicrously inadequate.

More than this—the habit of not listening, of reading by eye and not by ear certainly corrupts poetry, but it also corrupts prose. The cacophony of the average modern sentence, its unbalance and ambiguity, its mere drabness, is very often due to the fact that it is not heard in the mind. Our literati too often ignore the ultimate effect on literature as such of the general standard of writing, in newspapers, reviews, reports and so on, and are therefore unaware that the present need is not for 'freedom', but for a conscious and deliberate awareness of the sound and movement of the sentence.

London, S.E.26

Valerie Pitt

Book Reviews



THE ANGER OF ACHILLES. Homer's Iliad translated by Robert Graves.
(Cassell. 30s.)

Robert Graves is remarkable not only for being an excellent poet himself, but for a quite extraordinary insensitivity to the poetry of other people. So far as the poetry of the British Isles is concerned, his criticism sometimes leads one to believe that, in his view, the only poets of importance are Robert Skelton, himself and some of his brother officers of the First World War. To these perhaps should be added a certain number of Welsh and Irish bards whose works are no longer extant. This does not matter, since Robert Graves, by pure imagination, unaided even by any knowledge of the languages concerned, is able to give us a fairly good idea of what to everyone else in the world is irretrievably lost. Then there is the question of a poet's war record. Ideally, it would seem, a poet should be Welsh and a Fusilier. Certainly he must have served with the infantry somewhere or other. Thus, in a recent article, Robert Graves pours scorn on poor Vergil who, it seems, could not even slope a spear, but commends the rough and fragmentary Ennius because it is assumed that he must have behaved pretty well in the Punic Wars.

Another point to be noticed about the criticism of Robert Graves is that it employs two voices. There is a Graves Major and a Graves Minor, the former an authoritative, and even priggish, head prefect; the latter a cheeky and intelligent small boy. This ambivalence has tactical advantages. Graves Major will solemnly produce dogma out of a hat, and, if anyone questions the truth or the relevance of the dogma, Graves Minor from below the desk, will whisper the words 'pedant' or 'grammarian'. Unfortunately Graves Minor will never turn his shafts against Graves Major, nor will Graves Major exercise his authority over his more playful brother.

The gallant Fusilier has now turned his attention to the Iliad of Homer, having decided that it deserves 'to be rescued from the classroom curse which has lain heavily on it throughout the past twenty-six centuries, and become entertainment once more'. In fact, of course, very many people other than Robert Graves have through-

out the ages enjoyed the Iliad very much. All that his sentence seems to mean is that, having decided to translate the Iliad himself, he thinks (rightly) that he can make his version quite amusing. His chosen method is prose with occasional short lyrical interludes. There is nothing wrong with this; but, for some reason, he decides that if he is employing this method, then Homer's contemporaries must have employed it too. Putting the cart firmly in front of the horse, he writes as follows (Graves Major speaking): 'Other professional story-tellers must have been active in Homer's day, but since not a line of their original work, nor any tradition of it, has survived, we are justified in assuming that, like their ancient Irish, Welsh and Gaelic counterparts, they used prose; reserving verse for incidental passages of religious or dramatic importance only.' So, for some time, the high horse, with the cart in front of it, proceeds, and there is not a peep from Graves Minor, though he will no doubt describe me as a 'grammarian' if I point out that when we are told that Solon was Peisistratus's chief adviser, this is not only beside the point, but untrue.

However, by the time that Graves Major has finished with 'the Hittite "Song of Ullikummi", the Ugaritic "Baal", and similar works' (none of which, as he admits, have a great deal to do with Homer), Graves Minor is ready for the fray and makes some amusing remarks about 'Homer the satirist' though he seems unaware that he is not saying anything new and that there are other elements in Homer to which he is insensitive. And before long Graves Major is back again. He has been reading an interesting book on the loa-worship of the Haitians, and has to drag this in somehow. And so it goes on.

Fortunately, however, the Great White Fusilier is, like his sister goddess, a trinity. Apart from Graves Major and Graves Minor there is a third person who may rightly be described as Graves Superior, since he is so much more interesting and important than the other two. This third person is a fine poet, the writer of a clear and distinct prose, an admirable technician and, within the general limits imposed by the concept of the Fusilier, human, humorous and sensitive. We must be grateful therefore that nearly all the work of the actual translation of the the Iliad has been done by this superior Graves. It is good, clean, vigorous stuff. The prose moves rapidly; the short verse interludes are ingenious and often moving. The whole is not much like Homer; but this was scarcely to be expected, since, as is made clear in the Introduction, the honest Fusilier has only a very limited understanding of Homer. However, if it is not like Homer, it is like Robert Graves, and is therefore not only provocative, but very readable and exciting. This is a high tribute to the skill

and verve of the translator, since one who believes, as Graves says he does, that 'Achilles is soon discovered to be the real villain of the piece' must have missed the whole point of the original story.

REX WARNER

AMERICAN CRITICAL ESSAYS: TWENTIETH CENTURY. Selected and Introduced by Harold Beaver. (Oxford University Press: World's Classics Series. 7s.)

FICTION OF A GENERATION. Edited by Whit and Hallie Burnett. (MacGibbon & Kee. 18s.)

THE CHICAGO REVIEW ANTHOLOGY. Edited by David Ray. (University of Chicago Press: Cambridge University Press. 37s. 6d.)

Let me begin by stressing the importance of this splendid little volume of *American Critical Essays*. It is good and it is cheap. University teachers can invite their students to buy it; extra-mural lecturers can order it *en bloc* for their classes. The aim of the volume is to show critical writing in 'its most general, its most unlimited appeal'—an emphasis that might have opened the way to all sorts of trivial nonsense but which in fact has produced a volume that is not only splendid criticism but splendid reading. There is no talk of ontologies or affective fallacies or symbolic action, but there is the work of minds who know these phrases and have transposed them into critical currency, minds who are in touch with the vital renovation that took place in literary criticism in America in this century.

Someone (an American critic) once remarked that American criticism had become subtle to the point of secrecy, and it is this secrecy that the volume under review has sought to avoid. But despite the secrecy, no one can doubt that there was a renovation in the American critical scene, and that it did an important job, and that the job deserves more deference than it has had from this side of the Atlantic. The now old New Criticism emphasized the need for a critical vocabulary, and sought to transfer the emphasis, in teaching literature, from the historical approach to the critical. Analysis of texts and sound valuation seemed a more worthwhile way of teaching literature than the old method which spoke of the facts—the biographical or historical background of writing. This emphasis was given, in varying degrees, by such 'New Critics' as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren; by Kenneth Burke and R. P. Blackmur and Yvor Winters; by R. S. Crane and his fellow Chicago Aristotelians.

Remarkable as the effort of rehabilitation was, it received little attention in this country; and it is only in the last five years or so that

It has been possible to evoke these names and these methods in academic or literary conversation and be understood. The present volume does not show the schools of criticism and does not point up the variations in critical viewpoint (on this score I would have preferred a more substantial introduction); it is more concerned with what American critics have to say about American writers . . . a useful enough line to take, but one that again rather obscures the fact that American critics have, drastically and usefully, revalued English literature as well as their own. There are a few strange choices—a much out-dated essay by Van Wyck Brooks on Dreiser, an essay by Horace Gregory on Robinson Jeffers, and an essay by Robert Penn Warren on Faulkner which is revised from a review of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* and conceals in its revisions the enormous debt the essay owes to Cowley's work. But these are balanced by excellent things like Yvor Winters's 'Maule's Curse', R. P. Blackmur's 'An Adjunct to the Muses' Diadem: A Note on E.P.' and Philip Rahv's 'Paleface and Redskin'.

The critical effort I have spoken of was made chiefly in the pages of little magazines, financially precarious intellectual reviews whose purpose was, as Allen Tate put it, not to give the public what it wanted but what, through the medium of its most intelligent members, it ought to have. Criticism was part of the stock in trade of the *avant-garde* in the days when there was such a thing. Now the zest has gone; the little magazines of the first three or four decades of the century have created the new establishment; *The Kenyon Review* is no longer an arrogant challenger but the voice of those who have arrived. Where, then, is the new *avant garde*? One would like to say, as the editors of the two other volumes under review say, that it is in the little magazines still—perhaps the newer, smaller, non-paying little magazines. But, really, is it? In the earlier years of the century the little magazines represented the leading edge of literature, and presented a whole new viewpoint and new methodology in the arts, one that was too new to be accepted anywhere else. They advanced the cause of writers who were too startling to get into print in any other way; they stood for a disturbance in the field of ideas. Isaac Rosenfeld, in an essay, 'On the Role of the Writer and the Little Magazine', in *The Chicago Review Anthology*, notes a change, and deplures it. He observes that the *avant-garde* manners have been taken up and made fashionable by the new smart set, the Madison Avenue Man, the man who needs no disaffection or alienation to go with these manners; and he comments that these days it is so difficult for the writers to starve, for there are so many things he can do, so many forms of direct or indirect patronage. What remains, he says, in the

face of all the temptations, is to stay a real man, and to produce the real work of art.

Now literature and the magazine which prints it is shaped on one side by what it is possible for the writers to write and what the reader is willing to read. The advantage of the little magazine is that it has few readers, and these are interested and knowing ones—usually. The main function of the contemporary little magazine (and I am talking about America, where such magazines are plentiful, though unfailingly poor) is (a) to publish the work of writers who do not write in a commercial style, though in all likelihood if their work is good it will sooner or later be acceptable to larger magazines such as *The New Yorker* or *Esquire*, (b) to publish the non-commercial work of writers who are selling elsewhere, (c) to publish the inferior work of writers developing or already well-established. There are still, it is true, good writers who have come slowly to recognition and who have been brought into view by little magazines. J. F. Powers came into view through *Accent*. Walter Toman, certainly an important writer, was introduced by *The Chicago Review* and is well represented in the present anthology. Other writers present in this anthology—Jack Matthews, Walter Ballenger and Ellsworth Chunn—are clearly of some importance. And they will be found no doubt; the fight for recognition is not the rough-house that it once was.

This is not to say that the function of the little literary magazines is eclipsed; one can only wish that in this country there were more of them, devoted, particularly, to seeking out good short stories—for with the decline of places to publish, the short story has virtually disappeared in England. In America, the situation is not so bad; there are a number of mass-circulation periodicals publishing good stories, though their requirements are rigid; at the least, the little magazines add to the quantity and maintain the quality. Thus the little magazine does not disappear, but it does tend to publish work not differing radically from that in larger journals, and its contributors tend not to represent a new movement or even a new approach, but rather to appear as transients, unrelated to other writers in the issue and simply 'passing through'.

Both *The Chicago Review* and *Story* (the source of the collection misleadingly entitled, in this country, *Fiction of a Generation*) are magazines of some prestige. *Story* was founded in 1931 in Vienna, by Whit Burnett and Martha Foley, two American correspondents in Europe. It appeared bi-monthly; in 1933 it went to America and attracted the work of a number of important young writers, including Hemingway, Faulkner,

Ersine Caldwell and William Saroyan. It folded, for lack of money, in 1948. The present collection represents a selection from the stories printed in the forties. It contains Norman Mailer's first short story, and an early piece by Salinger, 'The Long Debut of Lois Taggart', in which a feckless, stupid debutante achieves maturity by letting her husband wear white socks. For the rest, the best stories are by the best writers, and, even then they are lesser pieces. William Faulkner provides a light anecdote about Yoknapatawpha County at the time of the Civil War, 'My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Harrykin Creek'. The less-known writers are dependably inferior, and the only surprise in the volume is Stanley Kauffmann's splendid story, 'Fulvous Yellow'.

The Chicago Review was founded in 1946 by a group of students at the University of Chicago with the aim of avoiding the current emphasis on criticism and of cultivating the talent of the unknown writer. As David Ray says in his introduction, it depended largely on works of merit rejected by the editors of larger magazines. It was, for the young writer, prestige-bringing, for one appeared here in good company—the review also attracted work by David Reisman, Henry Miller, Conrad Aiken, E. E. Cummings, Karl Shapiro, William Carlos Williams and other writers of distinction (pieces by all the above are in the present collection). In later years, it supported the early work of the Beat Generation and achieved the signal distinction of being banned by the university. The present volume contains some fine poetry, some excellent short stories, and a couple of interesting articles, together with some nonsense. Some of the material shows in itself why the bigger magazines didn't want it; but the better short stories show clearly enough that there is a need for such a magazine, even though by now most of the authors present have moved on to larger journals.

MALCOLM BRADBURY

CLEA by Lawrence Durrell. (*Faber. 16s.*)

Clea, the fourth and last volume of Lawrence Durrell's now celebrated 'Alexandria Quartet', has taken its place beside its 'siblings'. Like them it is surprisingly good in parts. Once more there are some splendid comic episodes: notably the apatheosis of dear Commander Scobie—familiar to readers of the earlier volumes for his transvestite proclivities—who ends up here as a saint of the Coptic Church, after appearing to the faithful in the guise of a woman. Again there are some highly dramatic scenes: the account of the rescue of Clea, after she has been harpooned while swimming, is

something to make the hardest heart beat faster. All the minor characters run true to their engaging form: Capodistria, reported murdered at the end of the unforgettable duck-shoot in *Justine*, reappears from the tomb, smiling his wily smile, although the unfortunate Fosca, now beloved of the Gaullist Pombal is well and truly shot by a Vichy Navy sentry. The city of Alexandria is once more most elaborately and lovingly evoked, and there are passages of memorable eloquence. Mr Durrell's writing at its best is rich, fresh and wholly unexpected. He has a voice which is unmistakably his own; he knows how to communicate scents, colours, smells, shapes; and if he has a faltering grasp of what is human and moral, he handles what is natural and physical with impressive self-assurance.

But—and, alas, it is a big but—this book and that whole of which it is a part must be called a disappointment. *Justine* contained the promise of something altogether better. The tension and vitality of that first volume have not been sustained, while defects which were then apparent in a small way have swollen and accumulated. For all its shining merits, this word-continuum, as Mr Durrell all too aptly calls it, bores one: it is far too clumsily-contrived, pretentious and long-winded. There is no doubting that we are in the presence of a poet; indeed we are not allowed to forget it, since the author bears his talent uneasily, as if it were a sin, and seeks, like Gide, to ease the burden of it by confession. The more ordinary habits of self-criticism and correction seem, however, alien to him. This last may be illustrated by a sentence or two from what is rightly thought to be one of the best things in the book: the description of Alexandria in wartime:

'A hive of white mansions flanking those narrow and abandoned streets of mud which were racked all night by Arab music and the cries of girls who so easily disposed of their body's wearisome baggage (which galled them) and offered to the night the passionate kisses which money could not disflavour. . . .

'Snatches of a quartet squirted from a café with scarlet awnings reminded me of Clea once saying: "Music was invented to confirm human loneliness". But if I walked here with attention and even a certain tenderness it was because for me the city was something which I myself had deflowered, at whose hands I had learned to ascribe some particular meaning to fortune.' (*Clea*, pp. 63-5)

All this assuredly has a certain hypnotic charm; but if one resists the spell and reflects upon those unhappy metaphors 'disflavoured', 'squirted' and 'deflowered'—not to mention the 'passionate kisses'—one can only wonder what has happened to the author's own powers of reflection and discrimination. Can he be so much in love with the

sound of his own voice? Is not the poet in him being submerged by the talker?

How often, in reading this book, is one reminded of those Irishmen one meets in Paris cafés, who go on and on all night beside a mounting pile of saucers, telling wonderful stories, recalling amorous adventures, reciting poems, cursing the Anglo-Saxon puritans, elaborating fantasies, cracking jokes, repeating themselves, laughing, gesticulating, banging the table, and, more often than not, giving endless expositions of their theories of Art and Philosophy.

Theories of Art and Philosophy play a prominent and ominous part in the 'Alexandria Quartet'. The author has invoked metaphysical uncertainty about the reality of Time to justify the maldroit construction of his book; and would like to persuade us that where there is no centre, no order, and no logical sequence, there is a superior kind of centre and order and logic. He has invoked similar doubts about Truth to justify an inconclusive, superficial and evasive treatment of what is supposed to be his central theme: emotional experience. This is not to say that the book is informed by one considered metaphysic. Mr Durrell has simply collected a variety of theories, and thrown them all in. Thus, to take the most obvious example, he has made three or four of his leading characters novelists, each with his own set of ideas about the nature of fictional truth; but these sets of ideas are alike in lacking explicit formulation, and all eventually merge into an incoherent mish-mash of—among others—Bergson, Goethe, Einstein, Spinoza and Sade.

What is most conspicuously missing—and it must seem a strange thing to be missing in a writer so self-consciously *Mediterranean* as Mr Durrell—is the classical Mediterranean philosophy of discipline, moderation and economy (Camus called it the philosophy of *mesure*). It must be admitted that the classical Mediterranean philosophy was always a corrective one, the antithesis of the Mediterranean temperament (which needs to be taught *mesure*); and it is the latter which is Mr Durrell's subject. He writes of a Mediterranean world, but both he and his audience are Northern; his place, like that of Rabelais and Henry Miller, is in our Northern literature (Anglo-Saxon, German, Celtic-French, his readers are no longer merely English, but they are not Southern). Having taken the relaxing ethos of Romanticism to a warmer climate, he is the better able to challenge and disconcert our constricted sensibilities, but not so well able to fulfil his avowed intention, which is 'to interrogate human values by an honest representation of human passions'. Mr Durrell is no interrogator; for the man who is always talking cannot listen.

MAURICE CRANSTON

FRIDAY'S FOOTPRINT by Nadine Gordimer. (Gollancz. 16s.)

THE MAGIC BARREL by Bernard Malamud. (Eyre & Spottiswoode. 16s.)

SPRING SONG by Joyce Cary. (Michael Joseph. 18s.)

Nadine Gordimer is so accomplished a writer that there is little a reviewer can say about her new book of short stories beyond describing them. Her technique is faultless: her taste, her sense of selection never err; it is only her themes that vary, and the fact that they do vary considerably is another tribute to her talent, for writers with a comparable mixture of skill and sensibility too often tend to lavish these on thin and repetitive subject matter. Of course, she has the literary advantage of her South African background, in itself interesting; but this could become a handicap, restricting the significance of her writing to that of a political manifesto. In her novel *A World of Strangers* she was able to treat a potentially political theme without a trace of dogmatism and also without evasion: this was 'committed' writing in the most truly liberal sense. The stories in *Friday's Footprint*, however, do not have *apartheid* at their centres. One of the best, a miniature novel called *Image of Success*, has a melodramatic plot: it describes the 'downfall' of a conventionally successful business man who suddenly, and apparently senselessly, jettisons every worldly advantage for the sake of a vision glimpsed in one romantic moment. This story is so perfectly judged by Miss Gordimer that one is aware only of its truth, and it is not until long after finishing it that one realizes how easily it could have been falsified into a banal romance. She is always excellent with children: in *The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight*, *Little Willie* and *Harry's Presence* she pinpoints that moment when a child first becomes conscious of adult corruption. Three stories are specifically 'African': *The Bridegroom*, describing the last night before his wedding of a young white man in a distant camp, strangely and inappositely serenaded by the Africans who are his only companions; a vivid account of a crocodile hunt called *The Gentle Art*; and *Something for the Time Being*, the only story in the collection to approach directly the subject of race relations, and doing so with a double-edged irony. Two stories—*Our Bovary* and *A Style of Her Own*—struck me as inferior: here the brilliance of the treatment fails to conceal the women's-magazine atmosphere surrounding the situations described (perhaps they were originally written for women's magazines). On the whole, however, this is as satisfactory a volume as any of Miss Gordimer's previous books.

With one novel and one book of short stories, Bernard Malamud has already created his own Malamud world, as instantly recog-

nizable from an opening sentence as the Salinger world, the Welty world, the world of James Purdy. He writes almost exclusively about Jewish life in New York (although three stories in *The Magic Barrel* deal with Americans travelling in Italy) and his dialogue has the plaintive eloquence, the stately inversions and terse authority that have become so familiar in the work of American-Jewish playwrights and novelists. But his world has not been created from the unity of his subject matter and the picturesque oddity of his vernacular—it is not the limited territory of the regional writer, but the boundless universe of an artist able to express his individual temperament by the intensity of his vision. Everything in his world corresponds closely to the world of nature; yet one feels that anything may happen in it, that his characters may suddenly transcend the prison of situation that limits them. Often his stories start as apparently comic sketches or conventional studies in pathos, and then imperceptibly take a different turn, unexpected without being eccentric: the best have a visionary quality, although Malamud never indulges in the symbolism usually associated with prophetic writing. Also, straight fantasy is absent; sometimes, writers for whom this claim of creating a private world is made turn out, on a second reading, to be merely fantasy-mongers with powers of invention rather than of imagination, or dogged exploiters of some exotic indiosyncrasy peculiar to their race or background. The dense tradition and atmosphere of orthodox Jewry are, on the contrary, played down by Malamud, who also ignores the straightforward 'race prejudice' story. His touch is light and his literary roots are deep; such a combination of attributes more than makes up for an occasional verbal clumsiness. I find these stories more exciting—because more varied—than his admirable novel *The Assistant*; like it, they are precise in description and unconfined in understanding.

The stories of Nadine Gordimer and Bernard Malamud bear the same relation to their novels as that of an artist's drawings to his oil paintings; their talents can be adjusted to the more restricted range and find complete expression within it. This was not the case with Joyce Cary, whose posthumously published collection of stories, *Spring Song*, resembles an artist's sketchbook, filled with fascinating but tentative notes for scenes and ideas that may or may not be developed in a full-length work. Many of these are about children—observed from the outside, with scientific precision and also with wonder, as in *Charley Is My Darling* and *A House of Children*. Others are set in West Africa, and might be notes for (or even brief extracts from) *Aissa Saved*, *Mister Johnson* or *The African Witch*. The few stories that do not fall into these categories, and apparently aim at

a more conventional and ambitious conception of the short story's function, seem to me unconvincing: in the love story called *A Good Investment*, for instance, the background is imprecise, the characterization is vague and the sudden switch at the climax into the historic present is a calculated affectation that does not succeed. Yet if this story had been expanded into a novel it might have been one of Cary's best. Given time and space in which to develop, it might have acquired the solidity that distinguishes his work—a solidity closer to reality than to fiction. In Cary's novels, we get to know his characters slowly and unevenly, as we get to know people in life; they are never presented complete in a page, equipped perhaps with a convenient catch-phrase, and then produced unchanged when needed by the plot. Such professional slickness was foreign to Cary, who cultivated the sincerity of an amateur; but his deliberately off-hand approach does not suit the shorter form. Although his style is simple, even bleak (except in *The Horse's Mouth*, where the technical brilliance masks an essential bogusness), it is far from direct; its lack of manner is itself a mannerism. Its first rate quality is produced by the paradoxical combination of extreme selectivity with a refusal to take anything for granted; what he does select is often the very aspect of his subject that others *would* have taken for granted. But in all short stories a high degree of selectivity on the writer's part is assumed by the reader, who is prepared to take a certain amount for granted in order to save time. Thus, these short pieces by Cary often seem to be stating the obvious to little advantage; the least 'literary' of novelists, by preserving a typical intransigence in an inescapably artificial literary form, fails to avail himself fully of its opportunities.

FRANCIS WYNDHAM

LAST ESSAYS by Thomas Mann. (*Secker and Warburg*. 21s.)

Having read the book, one puts it down, thinking: 'So that's all. "Last Essays". The last word. No more Thomas Mann novels to look forward to.' One remembers one's feverishly eager first reading of *Doctor Faustus* when it appeared ten years ago, his first novel since before the war. Then that strange, disturbing tale, *The Holy Sinner*; and *The Black Swan*, slight, compact, direct and moving; and the amusing-boring *Felix Krull*. And then at the age of eighty he died, the last of the great novelists: for there is no one of his stature still writing today, no one else with a body of work to compare with those complex masterpieces of irony, wisdom, compassion and sheer creative genius: *The Magic Mountain*, the *Joseph* tetralogy, and *Lotte in Weimar*.

His early novels were published in the first decade of this century,

at a time when European art was beginning to reflect the crisis in Western culture, the breakdown of nineteenth-century modes of thought and communication. The discoveries of Freud, the collapse shown in microcosm in Schnitzler's brilliant and dissecting portrayals of Viennese society, the personal neurosis enlarged and transformed into sound in the symphonies of Gustav Mahler, the new ways of seeing, of looking at the external world, that were being sought and found by Picasso, Braque, and the early Futurists, the explorations into new areas of music by Stravinsky and the Parisians, by Schönberg, Berg and Webern in Vienna, the Nietzschean outpourings of the young Gide: into this world, bridging it with the old, came the first novels and stories of Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, *Tonio Kröger*, *Death in Venice*. Traditional in style, though not in *mores*, they seem now not so much the youthful work of a master, as the culmination of a great period in German literature. Always conscious of the importance of a living tradition, of the laying on of hands, Mann carried upon his youthful shoulders the weight of the past, and, specifically, of Schiller and Goethe.

By far the longest of these *Last Essays* is the hundred-page lecture on Schiller. This was originally delivered by Mann at Stuttgart in 1955, in commemoration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Schiller's death. As befits such an occasion, it is an act of affectionate homage rather than a work of literary criticism. Nevertheless it has something of value to say to English readers, by whom Schiller is often regarded as one of those great names to whom lip-service must be paid, but whom it is not considered essential to read. The recent Old Vic production of Stephen Spender's highly effective translation of *Maria Stuart* was the first Schiller London had seen for years. Yet Mann in this essay reminds us of Schiller's theatrical effectiveness, of the excitement which even moderately competent productions of the plays can engender:

'I saw *Love and Intrigue* in Munich after the First World War, just after the Bavarian Soviet Republic had collapsed. The audience was profoundly middle-class, reactionary and conservative; the performance was mediocre. And yet the fire of the play threw this stodgy audience into a kind of revolutionary frenzy. The audience became Schiller fanatics, like every audience that has ever witnessed his plays.'

The figure of Schiller emerges from Mann's survey as a giant of language and of the drama, a dramatic poet whose great gifts of immediacy of impact and transfiguration of the ordinary into the ideal and the sublime are best described in four lines from *Wallenstein*:

Denn er stand neben mir wie meine Jugend,
 Er machte mir das Wirkliche zum Traum,
 Um die gemeine Deutlichkeit der Dinge
 Der goldnen Duft der Morgenröte webend.

Mann's examination of Nietzsche in the light of recent history leads him to make some pertinent comments on disease and genius, as he follows the steps by which Nietzsche's mind drove him onwards, 'lashed him on to the tortuous climb, and brought him to a martyr's death on the cross of thought'. Poor Nietzsche, who is misrepresented by most of his own statements, and who can only be truthfully represented by his entire life. Mann quotes his unfair reference to Christianity as 'the one immortal blot of shame upon the escutcheon of humanity', but points out that the letters he wrote from the final depths of his mental sickness were signed 'The Crucified One'. All one can say, finally, of his attitude to Christ is that it was one of passionate involvement: a loving hatred, a disbelieving faith.

The essay on Chekhov is a disappointment; but how thrillingly Mann makes amends in the *Fantasy on Goethe*. If his admiration was lavished on Schiller, then his love was reserved for and bestowed upon the many-sided genius of Goethe, whom in several ways he resembled. After one of his first meetings with Goethe, Schiller wrote: 'He has a gift for fascinating people and of being amiable to them with small as well as large attentions, but he manages to keep himself free of attachment all the while. He makes his existence pleasantly known, but only as would a god, without giving anything of himself.' The serene detachment which he wore like a cloak blinded many of his contemporaries to the deep sensuality of his nature. It is this aspect of Goethe to which Mann particularly responds, this 'sensuality undeterred by Christian conscience, full of lordly defiance to Christian morality and its social simperings'.

The true ambiguity of Goethe's nature closely parallels that of Mann. Both accepted with a majestically calm arrogance the world's high estimate of them. Both were capable, at the deepest levels, of jubilant affirmation and profound nihilism. Certainly, in his 'proud and classical antipathy to "the Cross"', Goethe almost anticipates Nietzsche; but whereas Nietzsche's attitude stemmed from neurosis, Goethe's was the result of upbringing, education and contemplation.

Having read these essays of Mann, one casts one's mind back to the novels. Fine though the essays are, it is as a novelist that Thomas Mann achieved greatness: it is as a great novelist that he will be remembered. The essay on Goethe is illuminating, but how much more so was the Goethe-novel, *Lotte in Weimar*. In the essay Mann is

concerned with communicating his enthusiasm, but in the novel, by a stroke of genius, he takes us inside the mind of Goethe, re-creating the man himself. And an authentic, revealing experience it is, of the kind that makes one jump up from the book one is reading, and walk about in excitement, exclaiming: 'How on earth does he do it?' These *Last Essays* at any rate remind us that the intuitive genius was allied to a superb analytical intelligence.

CHARLES OSBORNE

COLLECTED POEMS VOLUME III by Roy Campbell. (*Bodley Head*. 18s.)
IN IDLENESS OF AIR by Arthur Wolseley Russell. (*Scorpion Press*. 7s. 6d.)

THE MASKS OF LOVE by Vernon Scannell. (*Putnam*. 8s. 6d.)

THE GRAVEL PONDS by Peter Levi, S.J. (*Andre Deutsch*. 10s. 6d.)

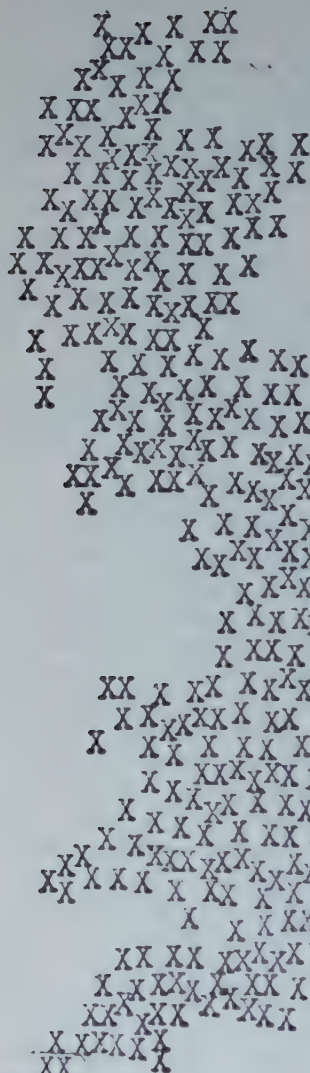
THE COLLECTOR AND OTHER POEMS by Peter Redgrove. (*Routledge & Kegan Paul*. 12s. 6d.)

LUPERCAL by Ted Hughes. (*Faber & Faber*. 12s. 6d.)

THRONES: CANTOS 96-109 by Ezra Pound. (*Faber & Faber*. 18s.)

The most indisputably successful of these books, and easily the most enjoyable, is Roy Campbell's volume of translations. Some of them are new, many are re-published; but it is an event to have this ample selection brought together. What distinguishes it is so remarkable a faithfulness to sense, rhythm, and above all concreteness of diction and imagery, that these versions read like rich originals. Not all, it is true, are quite up to the best. Those from *Les Fleurs du Mal* are simply very good. Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre* loses something, though less than one would have believed possible. Much of the lapidary casualness of Horace's *Art of Poetry* remains, but inevitably something of its terseness has gone. The Spanish translations, however (notably those from St John of the Cross and Lorca), are superb; and the most insulting poem in history, Quevedo's sonnet 'To a Nose', by a miracle loses almost nothing, save the brilliant and revolting pun that closes it. This is a book for many to buy, and for would-be translators of verse to study closely: over and over, Campbell shows his ability, in meeting a challenge, to surpass the reader's hopes.

A poet's problems are not, of course, those of a translator; but against the outstanding calibre of this book, its mastery, the verse of Mr Russell and Mr Scannell does not show up well. There is much that is picturesque and pleasing in the former, and a good deal that is neat, witty or touching in the latter. But both suffer from a kind of recurrent rough-and-readiness, a diction that tags and hurries on, instead of exploring and revealing. 'Light at heart we listened',



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'perfect in its bright tan of bracken', pine plantations 'in a warlock host', 'she, the gallant and gay', 'the laughter in your eyes', writes Mr Russell. From Mr Scannell we have things like 'his rampant greed and lust', 'youth's ebullient song', 'a deep capacity/For loving', and 'white flights/Of tendernesses'. A poet cannot coast.

The Gravel Ponds has weak phrases too: not relaxed and ready-made so much as showy or strained. Yet these do not detract greatly from the interest of this book, with its touches of the unexpected and imaginative, and the sense it often leaves of reflection and effort, of a distinctive mind bringing together an often intriguing variety of material, even if sometimes into an imperfect focus. Three consecutive stanzas (their subject is the inner world of the poet's mind) perhaps bring out these qualities of strain, imagination and distinctiveness in clear succession:

There blood is and dust, atom and star,
but in that dark no quiet planets are.

The fragments of a Christ's face
shatter apart to mere space;

O but his nature and name are written there
in Chinese circles of black atmosphere.

Many, however, will feel on safer ground with Mr Redgrove:

As if he bit, his teeth are fast in laughter.

He's a good boy not to let it bomb her body;

This is how he writes of a boy watching a fat woman climbing stairs: the lines are typical of his vigorous, almost boisterous apprehension, and his command of telling and forceful metaphor. Shearing grass, treading on a beetle, being stung by an insect, a worm eaten by a bird — these poems go for what has vigour, they hit hard and seem to stand no nonsense. My reservations are partly because to rely on what is ready-made, even in the now fashionable genre of the poem of married domesticity (the main subject of these poems) is no better than to do so in any other context; and Mr Redgrove seems not infrequently to slip into this. Thus 'Old House' closes a characteristically robust account of a stormy night with:

She turned in her sleep and called for me,

Then taught me what children were to make a home for.

A tactful reticence is understandable; but even so, the lines rather conspicuously sign-post towards experience rather than illuminate it. And this happens too often. Exactly one quarter of Mr Redgrove's poems rely for their structure on that would-be poignant twist in the last line or so; and here (as usual) it is a sign that the poem has

ROBERT GRAVES

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Sidgwick & Jackson

been left looking at a goal of which it has not taken possession. Indeed, it is surprising how hard these poems work to imbue what they describe with vigour ('A dung-hued thrush, and across the grass/The murder-cheerful cuckoo's hoot'), while often seeming to lack that more integral kind of poetic vigour which moves the poem from within. But when all is said, this is a promising first book of verse.

Lupercal, in general, is a very appreciable advance on Mr Hughes's first book of verse (*The Hawk in the Rain*) so far as discipline, directness and concentration are concerned; and it is remarkable how these new poems, which are usually so intent on seeing their subjects as (to quote Mr Hughes on pikes) 'killers from the egg', should at the same time achieve their dry poise and deliberately disjointed yet sinewy rhythms. I am not sure that there is any poem in the second volume quite as distinctive as 'Wind' in Mr Hughes's first; but these new and more astringent qualities do much to buttress and validate what he is best known for, his outstanding gift for embodying energies and violences in his verse: in this book, pigs that 'must have hot blood, they feel like ovens', thrushes like coiled steel, a bull with 'the hotly-tongued/Mash of his cud', an aged cat 'like a bundle of old rope and iron' and so on. At times there is perhaps something narrow, even (oddly enough) Parnassian about this poet's shrewdly organized pursuit of the takingly violent: this culminates here in the snowdrop 'brutal as the stars of this month' (whatever that means), which to me rings quite false. But some of these poems (I would mention 'Strawberry Hill', 'Pennines in April', 'To Paint a Water Lily', and 'Cat and Mouse') really bring out the deeper resonance of this poet's pre-occupation with stress, force and the power of life in things; and all in all this is a very notable book.

Pound's name is too often invoked as a war-cry by those absorbed in literary polemics and label-pasting. An effort has to be made if the real interest of *Thrones*, the latest instalment of the Cantos, is to be located. It does not lie in Pound's specific ideas for social policy (taken by themselves these are sometimes trite and sometimes faddish), nor in his bare juxtaposition of ideas, omitting connecting links (this is ancient history); nor of course does it lie in the conventionally beautiful passages (astounding as these are) which occur in this enigmatic work from time to time. But by now the Cantos can be seen to express a comprehensive vision, almost a mystical one, of human life as a part of total reality. As the poem has gone on, Pound's key ideas have been coming more and more substantially ('clearly' is hardly the word) into relation. No doubt what I say here is very much subject to error, but it seems to me that Pound is

preoccupied with gold in currency matters (and hence with credit) because he sees gold as also the key substance in the work of the craftsman and artist, and again as the counterpart, in both these fields, to light and to the sun itself in life as a whole: finally, the link is then possible with light as intellectual clarity, the Chinese *ming* as he likes to call it. As for physical light, it is moving stone; and stone the embodiment in matter of a rule of law in men's affairs which is no set of mere rules, but a total mode of life. Thus the stone temple, the integrity of the mason (and with him every other manifestation of *techne* and genuine labour, of which Pound's sense is wonderfully authentic), the work of the good ruler, and the pulsating light-filled radiance of the natural world, all come together. The vision takes shape:

The sages of Han had a saying
 Manners are from earth and from water . . .
 . . . the peoples
 Different each, different customs
 but one root in the equities,
 One in acumen,
 with the sun (chih)
 under it all

This is from Canto 99, one of those in *Thrones*. A full discussion would take one far back through the poem (at least to Canto 17); but this latest instalment does much to clarify the basic vision of the Cantos, and as such it has an outstanding claim to attention.

JOHN HOLLOWAY

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Notes About Our Authors



KAY CICELLIS was born in 1926. Her family settled in Greece in 1936, and she was educated at an American school near Athens. Married in 1957, she is at present living in Manchester. She has published four works of fiction, and a new book, of three long stories, is to be published in the autumn by Secker & Warburg.

RAY MATHEW was born in Australia in 1929, has contributed poetry, short stories, and reviews to Australian magazines, has had two books of verse published in Australia and has written several plays, one of which *The Life of the Party* is to be produced in London in the autumn. He has recently arrived in England, and has been awarded an Arts Council Drama Bursary.

MALCOLM BRADBURY is 28. He is now staff tutor in literature in the Adult Education Department at The University of Hull. He recently spent a year in the U.S.A. as the British Association of American Studies Junior Fellow, doing research on American literary expatriates in Europe.

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